THE ®

saint

MYSTERY MAGAZINE

MAY
35c

Edited by LESLIE CHARTERIS

Featuring

EDGAR WALLACE

ROBERT BLOCH

LOUIS GOLDING

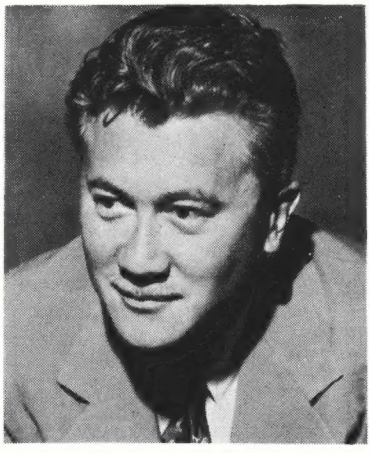
MIRIAM ALLEN deFORD

LESLIE CHARTERIS

Story To Be Whispered

A New Story by CORNELL WOOLRICH

SOME OLD, SOME NEW — THE FINEST IN MYSTERY FICTION



The controversy about capital punishment keeps on arising and subsiding again, swinging this way and that; but I venture to assert that there is one section of the public in which any poll would produce an overwhelming majority in favor of the death penalty, and that comprises the readers of detective stories.

I base this belief on the fact that nearly all such stories culminate happily in the extinction of the murderer, or the inference that his trial and execution will follow automatically, with every certainty that the right culprit has been found and that absolute justice is being done. If there is any question of anyone being falsely convicted (and there very often is) this disconcerting thought is always introduced early in the yarn, merely to build up suspense and sympathy for the innocent victim of wicked conspirators or stupid policemen, although all experienced readers really feel comfortably sure that the truth will be discovered before it's too late and it will be an indisputable malefactor who finally stands on the trapdoor or sits in the chair. This therefore must be what the readers want.

Indeed, there is a large and influential body of authors which never even gives the villain the oldfashioned formality of a trial, but has him or her cheerfully perforated by the detective as soon as that infallible superman is personally satisfied with the evidence, thus eliminating all risk that a susceptible jury might foul up the good work with an acquittal; and sometimes this method seems to be even more heartily approved by the public, at least in their reading.

It is well known to all his followers that the Saint has operated in both ways, and in fact has not always confined his personal executions to the cause of murder. He is on record as maintaining that there are other crimes, such as blackmail and dealing in narcotics, which are no less destructive and often more cold-blooded than homicide, and which deserve just as severe a punishment. As to how drastic that retribution should be, he has also said that to lock a criminal up for anything like "life", a sentence which precludes any theoretical rehabilitation, is not doing him much good and chiefly penalizes the honest taxpayers who are stuck with the cost of keeping him in jail.

If you ask how far the Saint speaks for me, I will say very bluntly that the only argument against capital punishment which seems valid to me is the risk that a terrible injustice may be done which can never be undone. But today, in civilized communities, lawyers are so nimble and juries so cautious that the odds against convicting an innocent suspect are astronomical. On the other hand, the number of irrefutably proven cases where a convicted killer has escaped or been paroled to kill again is quite frightening. Those casualties were just as innocent victims of injustice as if they had been mistakenly executed. The war against crime is not just a figure of speech, and in all wars some good guys get killed. Our object is to keep that number as small as possible, and I think the old detective-story tradition is still the best.

Leslie Charteris

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THE SAINT MYSTERY MAGAZINE, March, 1963, Vol. 18, No. 3. Published monthly by FICTION PUBLISHING COMPANY, 30 East 42nd Street, New York 17, New York, by arrangement with Saint Magazines, Inc. Single copy price, 35c. Subscriptions in U. S. and Canada, $4.00 per year. Subscrption in foreign countries, $5.00 per year. Names of people and places are fictitious and any use of the name of an actual person or place is purely coincidental. Printed in U. S. A. Copyright 1963 by Fiction Publishlng Company.

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the simon templar foundation

by Leslie Charteris

THERE WAS nothing unusual about the fact that when Simon Templar landed in England he was expecting trouble. Trouble was his chosen vocation; the last ten years of his life had held enough of it to satisfy a couple of dozen ordinary men for three or four lifetimes, and it would have been surprising if after so many hectic events he had contemplated a future of rustic quietude, enlivened by nothing more thrilling than wild gambles on the laying abilities of leghorns. But it was perhaps more unusual that the particular trouble which he was expecting on this occasion could not be blamed on any fault of his.

He came down the gangway of the *Transylvania* with a light

When a character has had as long a run as the Saint, the author must eventually be overtaken by problems which he never foresaw when he began his creation. For the world moves on, not even steadily, but with what often seems to be an inexorable acceleration; and the writer himself grows older, wiser, and a better master of his craft. As with all aging, the changes are gradual, almost imperceptible from year to year, until one day it becomes possible to see this whole accumulation in one startling glance, as by placing a man of 50 beside his photograph taken 30 years before. This is the awkward stage in which many early Saint stories are caught today, including this one, so they have to be prefaced with a word of warning before some unwary newcomer stubs his toe on an anachronism.

Therefore please note that this story was first published before Adolph Hitler came to power even in Germany, and try to remember (if you are ancient enough) how much the world has changed since then. So you will realize that the World War referred to ended in 1919, and for a considerable time thereafter the "Merchants of Death" theme was much more popular and plausible than it has since become, and perhaps be amused by this very first appearance of Hoppy Uniatz.

L. C.

From: THE MISFORTUNES OF MR. TEAL, by Leslie Charteris.
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step in the summer sunlight, with a soft grey hat canted rakishly over one eye, and a raincoat slung carelessly over his shoulder. There was death in his pocket and peril of an even deadlier kind under his arm; but he faced the Customs officer across his well-labelled luggage with an easy smile, and ran a humorous glance down the list of dutiable and prohibited articles presented for his inspection.

"Yes," he said, "I'm carrying large quantities of silk, perfume, wines, spirits, tobacco, cut flowers, watches, embroidery, eggs, typewriters, and explosives. I also have some opium and a couple of howitzers——"

"You don't have to be funny about it anyway," grunted the official, and scrawled the cryptic hieroglyphics that passed him through with his two guns into England.

He sauntered on through the bleak echoing shed, waving casual adieus to his acquaintances of the voyage. An American banker from Ohio, who had lost three thousand dollars to him over the poker-table, buttonholed him without malice.

"See you look me up next time you're in Wapakoneta," he said.

"I won't forget," Simon answered gravely.

There was a girl with raven hair and deep grey eyes. She was very good to look upon, and Simon had sat out with her on the boat deck under the moon.

"Perhaps you'll be coming to Sacramento one day," she said.

"Maybe I will," he said with a quick smile; and the deep grey eyes followed him rather wistfully out of sight.

Other eyes followed the tall lean figure as it swung by, and carried their own pictures of the brown fighting face and the smile that touched the strong reckless mouth and the gay blue eyes. They belonged to a Miss Gertrude Tinwiddle, who had been seasick all the way over, and who would never have been taken on to the boat deck anyhow.

"Who is that man?" she asked.

"His name is Templar," said her neighbour, who knew everything. "And you mark my words, there's something queer about him. I shouldn't be surprised if he was a sort of gangster."

"He looks like a—a sort of cavalier," said Miss Tinwiddle timidly.

"Pish!" said her companion testily, and returned to the grim task of trying to convince a cynical Customs officer that twenty-four silk dresses would have been a beggarly allowance even for a week-end traveller.

At the end of the shed, Detective-Sergeant Harry Jepson of

the Southampton C.I.D. said to Police Constable Ernest Potts:

"You see the tall fellow in the grey tweeds coming this way? Handsome devil, isn't he? Well, you'd better remember that face."

"Who is he?" asked Police Constable Potts.

"That," said Sergeant Jepson, "is Mr. Simon Templar, alias the Saint; and you aren't likely to see a smarter crook than him in your time. At least, I hope not. He's committed every blooming crime there is from murder downwards, and he'll tell you so himself, but nobody's ever been able to hang a thing on him. And to look at him you'd think he had a conscience like a newborn babe."

In which utterance Detective-Sergeant Harry Jepson was as close to eternal truth as he was ever likely to get; for the Saint had never been sure that he had a conscience at all, but if he had one there was certainly nothing on it. He looked the two officers shamelessly in the eye as he approached, and as he strolled past them his right hand waved a quizzical salute that had no regard whatever for the affronted majesty of the law.

"D'you ever hear of such blooming sauce?" demanded Mr. Jepson indignantly.

But Simon Templar, who was called the Saint, neither heard nor cared. He stood on the railroad platform, tapping a cigarette on a thin platinum case, and panned a thoughtful and quietly vigilant eye along the whole length of the train. He was expecting somebody to meet him, but he knew that it would not be anyone whose welcome would be friendly; and he had the additional disadvantage of not even being able to guess what the welcomer might look like. The Saint's vocation was trouble, but he had contrived to stay alive for thirty-two years only because of an unceasing devotion to the business of divining where the trouble would come from, and meeting it on his toes.

"Wantcher luggidge in the van, sir?" asked the porter who was wheeling his barrow.

The Saint's gaze travelled round to measure up two suitcases and a wardrobe trunk.

"I think so, George," he murmured. "I shouldn't be able to run very far with that load, should I?"

He took over his small overnight bag, and saw the rest of his impedimenta registered through to his apartment on Picadilly. He was still carrying the black book under his arm, and it occurred to him that there were more convenient forms of camouflage for it than the slung raincoat by

which it was temporarily hidden. He paused at the bookstall and glanced over the volumes of fiction offered for the entertainment of the traveller. In the circumstances, his choice had to be dictated by size rather than subect-matter.

"I'll take this," he said brazenly and the assistant's eyes bulged slightly as he paid over three half-crowns for a copy of an opus entitled *Her Wedding Secret*.

A signpost adjoining the bookstall invited gentlemen to enter and make themselves at home, and the Saint drifted through with his purchase. No other gentlemen were availing themselves of the Southern Railway's hospitality at the time, and it was the work of a moment to slip the intriguing jacket from the volume he had just bought and transfer it to the black book from under his arm, where it fitted quite comfortably. He pitched the unknown lady's wedding secret dextrously through the skylight, and went out again with the newly-jacketed black book conspicuously flaunted in his hand—no one who had been watching him would have had any reason to suspect that there had been any change in the contents of that artistically suggestive wrapper.

There were several minutes left before the train was due to leave, and the Saint strolled unhurriedly along the platform with his bag, as though selecting a carriage. If the welcomer or welcomers that he expected were there, he wanted to help them in every possible way. He covered the whole length of the train before he turned back, and then made his choice of an empty smoker. Pushing his suitcase up on to the rack, and dumping his raincoat and book on a corner seat, he leaned out of the window and slid another idly thoughtful glance over the scene.

A military-looking man of about forty-five, with a strongly aquiline nose, and a black guardee moustache, came slowly down the platform. He passed the window without looking round, walked on a little way, and turned. He stood there for a while, teetering toe to heel and gazing vacantly over the gallery of posters plastered on the opposite wall; then he came back, past the Saint's window again, circumnavigated a farewell party congregated outside the next carriage and did the same thing on the other side.

The Saint's cool blue eyes never once looked directly at him; his brown keen-cut face never changed its expression from one of languid patience, but he had seen every movement

of the military-looking man's manoeuvres. And Simon Templar knew, beyond a shadow of doubt, that this was at least one of the welcomers whom he had been expecting.

Along the train came a bustle of belated activity, the banging of doors, the scream of the guard's whistle. Simon remained in his window, finishing his cigarette, and saw the military-looking man climb into an adjoining compartment. The engine let out a hiss of steam, and the platform began to slip back under his eyes.

Simon dropped his cigarette and settled back into his corner. He turned the pages of the black book in its new wrapper, refreshing his memory. The action was more automatic than deliberate, only different in degree from a nervous person's gesture in twiddling this thumbs while waiting on tenterhooks for some anticipated event to happen. The Saint already knew almost every line of that amazing volume by heart —he had had plenty of time to study it from cover to cover on the voyage over. The odds were about fifty to one that the military-looking man was mentioned somewhere in its pages; but it was rather difficult to decide, out of the available names, which one he was most likely to bear.

The conductor came round and collected tickets; and then fifteen minutes passed before the door of the Saint's compartment slid back again. Simon closed his book and looked up with exactly the conventional nuance of irritated curiosity, which darkens the distinguished features of the railroad passenger who has contrived to secure a compartment to himself and who finds his privacy illegitimately invaded at the last moment; but the military-looking man put his back to the door and stared at him with a grimness that was by no means conventional.

"Come on," he said grimly. "Give me that book!"

"What, this?" said the Saint in innocent surprise, raising *Her Wedding Secret.* "You're welcome to it when I've finished, brother, but I hardly think it's in your line. I've only got to the part where she discovers that the man she has married is a barbarian lover——" The intruder pushed the unoffending volume roughly aside.

"I don't mean that," he said shortly. "You know perfectly well what book I mean."

"I'm afraid I don't," said the Saint.

"And you know perfectly well," continued the intruder, "what I'm going to do if I don't get it."

Simon shook his head.

"I can't guess that one either,"

he remarked mildly. "What is it —slap my wrist and tell me to stand in the corner?"

The man's mouth was working under his moustache. He came further into the compartment, past the Saint, and jerked a small automatic from his pocket. It was almost pathetically amateurish movement—Simon could have forestalled it easily, but he wanted to see how far the other would go.

"Very well," grated the man. "I'll have to take it myself. Put 'em up!'

"Up what?" asked the Saint, doing his best to understand.

"Put your hands up. And don't think of any more of that funny stuff, or you'll be sorry for it."

Simon put his hands up lazily. His bag was on the rack directly over his head, and the handle was within an inch of his fingers.

"I suppose the keepers will be along to collect you in a minute, old fruit?" he drawled. "Or do you fancy yourself as a sort of highwayman?"

"Now listen, you," came the snarling answer. "I'm going to allow you five seconds to give me that book. If I haven't got it in that time, I'm going to shoot. I'll start counting now. One . . . two . . ."

There was a crazy red glare in the intruder's eyes, and although the gun was shaking unsteadily, something told Simon that he had permitted the melodrama to go far enough.

"You know all the rules, don't you, brother?" he said gently; and his fingers grasped the handle of his bag and hurled it full into the other's face.

The man reeled back with the force of the impact, and went crashing against the outside door. It flew open under his weight; and the Saint's blue eyes turned to sudden ice as he realised that it could not have been properly latched when he got in. For one awful instant the man's fingers clawed at the frame; and then with a choking gasp he was gone, and there was only the drab streaked wall of the cutting roaring by the door. . . .

Simon's hand reached up instinctively towards the communication cord. And then it drew back.

The intruder, whoever he was, had asked for it: he had taken his own chances. And although Simon Templar had only done what was justified in self-defence, he knew his own reputation at Scotland Yard too well to believe for a moment that it would be a brief and simple task to impress that fact upon the suspicious hostility of the C.I.D. To stop the train would achieve nothing more helpful than his own immediate arrest; and of all

the things which might happen to him while he had that black book in his possession, an interlude behind bars in Brixton Prison was the least exhilarating.

He caught the swinging door and closed it again, and then restored his suitcase to the rack. The unknown casualty's gun had gone out with him—there was no other evidence that he had ever entered the compartment.

The Saint lighted a cigarette and sat down again, listening to the rhythmic thrum and rattle of the wheels pounding over the metals towards London. There was nothing unusual about the fact that he was expecting trouble when he returned to Europe, or even about the fact that a fair sample of that trouble should have greeted him within such a short time of setting foot in England.

But it was perhaps more unusual that the particular trouble he was expecting could not be blamed on any fault of his. And the queerest thing of all was that everything should hinge around the black book on his knee which was the legacy of Rayt Marius —the strangest and deadliest gift that any man ever received.

He was one of the first passengers to alight from the train at Waterloo, with his raincoat slung over his shoulder and the book in his hand; but he did not take the first available taxi. He allowed six to go by him, and boarded the seventh after taking a good look at it.

"Hyde Park Corner," he directed it clearly, and watched the traffic out of the rear window as they drove away.

Another taxi swung in behind them, and he noted the number. Five minutes later he looked again, and it was still there. Simon pressed the button of the telephone.

"Turn right round at Hyde Park Corner and go back the way we've come," he said.

He waited a short time after his instructions had been carried out, and look back for the third time. The other taxi was plugging patiently along three yards behind, and the Saint's teeth gleamed in a thin smile. Coincidence of destination was one thing, but coincidence of such a radical change of direction as he had ordered his driver to carry out was quite another matter.

"Now we'll go through the Green Park and up St. James's Street," he said through the telephone.

The driver was so moved that he opened the door an inch and performed incredible contortions to yell back through it.

"Wot is this?" he demanded.

"A game of 'ide-and-seek?"

"You have no idea," said the Saint.

The apartment he was heading for was in the north side of Piccadilly, overlooking the Green Park. It was only one of many addresses that he had had at various times, to several of which he still owned the keys; but it was the one which had been prepared for his return, and he had no intention of being prevented from going there. The only question was how the shadowing party was to be shaken off.

As they ran up St. James's Street he looked at the meter and counted off the necessary change to pay the fare with a substantial tip. When the next traffic light reddened against them he stretched a long arm through the window and thrust the money into the driver's hand.

"I shall be leaving you any minute, now, Alphonse," he said. "But don't let that stop you. Keep right on your way, and don't look back till you get to Hyde Park Corner. And have a bob on Samovar for the Derby."

He had the door on the latch as they passed the Ritz, and his steel-blue eyes were watching the traffic intently. Three buses were taking on passengers at the stop just west of the hotel, and as they went past the leader was edging out into the stream. Simon looked back and saw it cut out close behind him, baulking the following taxi; and that was his chance. In a flash he was out of the cab dropping nimbly to the road, and the red side of the bus thundered by a couple of inches from his shoulder. It hid him perfectly from whoever was trailing him in the other cab, which was trying to pass the obstruction and catch up again; and he stood on the sidewalk and watched the whole futile procession trundling away westwards with a relentless zeal that brought an irresponsible twinkle of sheer urchin mischief into his eyes.

A few minutes later he was sauntering into his apartment building and nodding cheerily to the janitor.

"Anybody called while I've been away, Sam?" he asked, as if he had only been away for a week-end.

Sam Outrell's beam of delight gave way to a troubled gravity. He looked furtively about him.

"There was two detectives here the other day, sir," he said.

The Saint frowned at him thoughtfully for a moment. Although Sam Outrell was nominally employed by the management of the building, he was on Simon Templar's private pay-roll as well; but no stipend could have bought the look of almost

dog-like devotion with which he waited anxiously for the Saint's reaction. Simon looked up at him again and smiled.

"I expect they were the birds I hired to try and find a collar-stud that went down the waste pipe," he said, and went whistling on his way to the lift.

He let himself into his apartment noiselessly. There were sounds of someone moving about in the living-room, and he only stopped to throw his hat and coat on to a chair before he went through and opened the second door.

"Hullo, Pat," he said softly. "I thought you'd be here."

Across the room, a tall slender girl with fair golden hair gazed at him with eyes as blue as his own. There was the grace of a pagan goddess in the way she stood, caught in surprise as she was by the sound of his voice, and the reward of all journeys in the quiver of her red lips.

"So you have come back," she said.

"After many adventures," said the Saint, and took her into his arms.

She turned away presently, keeping his arm round her, and showed him the table.

"I got in a bottle of your favourite sherry," she said rather breathlessly, "in case you came."

"In case?" said the Saint.

"Well, after you wired me not to meet you at Southampton——"

He laughed, a quiet lilt of laughter that had rung in her memory for many weeks.

"Darling, that was because I was expecting another deputation of welcome at the same time, and it might have spoilt the fun for both of us. The deputation was there, too—but you shall hear about that presently."

He filled the two glasses which stood beside the bottle and carried one of them over to an armchair. Over the rim of his glass he regarded her, freshening the portrait which he had carried with him ever since he went away. So much had happened to him, so many things had touched him and passed on into the illimitable emptiness of time, but not one line of her had changed. She was the same as she had been on the day when he first met her, the same as she had been through all the lawless adventures that they had shared since she threw in her lot irrevocably with his. She looked at him in the same way.

"You're older," she said quietly.

He smiled.

"I haven't been on a picnic."

"And there's something about you that tells me you aren't on a picnic even now."

He sipped the golden nectar

from his glass and delved for a cigarette. When she said that he was older she could not have pointed to a grey hair or a new line on his face to prove her statement. And at that moment she felt that the clock might well have been put back five years. The fine sunburnt devil-may-care face, the face of a born outlaw, was in some subtle way more keenly etched than ever by the indefinable inward light that came to it when trouble loomed up in his buccaneering path. She knew him so well that the lazy quirk of the unscrupulous freebooter's mouth told a story of its own, and even the whimsical smile that lurked on in his eyes could not deceive her.

"It isn't my fault if you develop these psychic powers, old sweetheart," he said.

"It's your fault if you can't even stay out of trouble for a week now and again," she said, and sat on the arm of his chair.

He shook his head, and took one of her hands.

"I tried to, Pat, but it just wasn't meant to happen. A wicked ogre with a black guardee moustache hopped through a window and said 'Boo!' and my halo blew off. If I wanted to, I could blame it all on you."

"How?"

"For just managing to catch me in Boston before I sailed, with that parcel you forwarded!"

Patricia Holm puckered her sweet brow.

"Parcel? . . . Oh, I think I remember it. A thing about the size size of a book—it came from Monte Carlo, didn't it?"

"It came from Monte Carlo," said the Saint carefully, "and it was certainly about the size of a book. In fact, it was a book. It was the most amazing book I've ever read — maybe the most amazing book that was ever written. There it is!"

He pointed to the volume which he had put down on the table, and she stared at it and then back at him in utter perplexity.

"*Her Wedding Secret*?" she said. "Have you gone mad, or have I?"

"Neither of us," said the Saint. "But you wouldn't believe how many other people are mad about it."

She looked at him in bewildered exasperation. He was standing up again, a debonair wide-shouldered figure against the sunlight that streamed in through the big windows and lengthened the evening shadows of the trees in the Green Park. She felt the spell of his daredevil delight as irresistable as it had always been, the absurd glamour which could even take half the sting from his moments

of infuriating mysteriousness. He smiled, and his hands went to her shoulders.

"Listen, Pat," he said. "That book is a present from an old friend, and he knew what he was doing when he sent it to me. When I show it to you, you'll see that it's the most devilishly clever revenge that ever came out of a human brain. But before we go any further, I want you to know that there's more power in that book for the man who's got it than anyone else in England has today, and for the very reason——"

The sharp trill of the telephone bell cut him off. He looked at the instrument for a moment, and then lifted the receiver.

"Hullo," he said.

"This is Outrell, sir," said an agitated voice. "Those two detectives I told you about—they're just bin here again. They're on their way up to you now, sir."

Simon gazed dreamily at the ceiling for a second or two, and his finger-tips played a gently syncopated tattoo on the side table.

"Okay, Sam," he said. "I'll give them your love."

He replaced the instrument and stood with his hand on it, looking at Patricia. His level blue eyes were mocking and enigmatic, but this time at least she knew enough of his system to read beyond them.

"Hadn't you better hide the book?" she said.

"It is hidden," he answered, touching the gaudy wrapper. "And we may as well have a look at these sleuths."

The ringing of another bell put a short stop to further discussion, and with a last smile at her he went out to open the door. The trouble was coming thick and fast, and there were tiny chisellings at the corners of his mouth to offset the quiet amusements in his eyes. But he only stopped long enough in the little hall to transfer the automatic from his hip pocket to a pocket in his raincoat, and then he opened the door wide with a face of seraphic tranquillity.

Two men in dark suits stood on the mat outside. Both of them wore bowler hats; neither of them carried sticks or gloves.

"Mr. Simon Templar?" queried one of them, in a voice of astounding refinement.

Simon nodded, and they moved determinedly through the door with a concerted solidity which would have certainly have obstructed any attempt he might have made to slam it in their faces.

"I am Inspector Nassen," said the genteel spokesman, "and I have a warrant to search your flat."

"Bless my soul," ejaculated the Saint, with his juiciest lisp. "So you're one of our new public school policemen. How perfectly sweet!"

The other's lips tightened.

"We'll start with searching you," he said shortly.

His hands ran over the Saint's pockets in a few efficient movements which were sufficient to assure him that Simon had no lethal weapon on his person. The Saint restrained a natural impulse to smack him on the nose, and smiled instead.

"This is a great game, Snowdrop, isn't it?" he said. "Personally I'm broad-minded, but if you did these things to a lady she might misunderstand you."

Nassen's pale face flushed wrathfully, and an unholy gleam came into the Saint's eye. Of all the detectives who ought never to have called upon him, one who was so easily baited was booked for a rough passage before he ever set out.

"We'll go over the flat now," he said.

Simon led them into the living-room and calmly set about refilling his sherry glass.

"Pat," he explained casually, "these are two little fairies who just popped through the keyhole. They seem to want to search the place and see if it's all cleany-weeny. Shall we let them get on with it?"

"I suppose so," said Patricia tolerantly. "Did they wipe their tootsy-wootsies before they came in?"

"I'm afraid not," said the Saint. "You see, they aren't well well-bred little fairies. But when you have a beautiful Oxford accent you aren't supposed to need manners as well. You should just hear Snowdrop talking. Sounds as if all his teeth were loose . . ."

He went on in the same vein throughout the search, with an inexhaustible resource of wicked glee, and it was two very red and sputtering men who faced him after they had ransacked every room under the running commentary with which he enlivened their tour.

"Get your hat," Nassen said. "You're coming along with us."

Simon put down his glass—they were back in the living-room.

"On what charge, Snowdrop?" he inquired.

"The charge is being in possession of information contrary to the Official Secrets Act."

"It sounds a mouthful," Simon admitted. "Shall I pack my powder-puffs as well, or will you be able to lend me one?"

"Get your hat!" Nassen choked out in a shaking voice.

The Saint put a cigarette be-

tween his lips and stroked a thumb over the cog of his lighter. He looked at Patricia through the first feather of smoke, returning the lighter to his pocket, and the careless twinkle in his eyes might or might not have been an integral part of the smile that flitted across his brown face.

"It looks as if we shall have to finish our talk later, old darling," he murmured. "Snowdrop is in a hurry. Save some sherry for me, will you? I shan't be long."

Almost incredulously, but with a sudden leap of uncomprehending fear, she watched him saunter serenely from the room, and through the open door she saw him pick up his raincoat from the hall chair and pause to adjust his soft hat to its correct piratical angle before he went out. Long after he had gone, she was still trying to make herself believe that she had seen Simon Templar, the man who had tantalised all the forces of law and order in the world for more years than any of them liked to be reminded of, arrested as easily as that.

Riding in a taxi between the two detectives, the Saint looked at his watch and saw that he had been in England less than four hours, and he had to admit that the pace was fairly rapid even by his exacting standards. One whiskered hold-up merchant, an unidentified shadower in a taxi, and two public school detectives, worked out at a reasonably hectic average for the tive involved; but Simon knew that that was only a preliminary sample of the kind of attention he could expect while he remained the holder of *Her Wedding Secret*.

On either side of him, Nassen and the other sleuth licked their sores in silence. Whether they were completely satisfied with the course of events so far is not known, nor does the chronicler feel that posterity will greatly care. Simon thought kindly of other possible ways of adding to their martyrdom; but before he had made his final choice of the various forms of torment at his disposal the taxi was stopped by a traffic light at the corner of St. James's Street, and the Saint looked through the window from a range of less than two yards full into the chubby face and the sleepy eyes of the man without whom none of his adventures were really complete.

Before either of the other two could stop him, he had slung himself forward and loosed a delighted yell through the open window.

"Claud Eustace, by the bedsocks of Dr. Barnardo" cried the Saint joyfully.

The man's drowsy optics re-

volved towards the source of the sound, and, having located it, widened with indescribable eloquence. For a second or two he actually stopped chewing on his gum. His jaws seized up, and his portly bowler-hatted figure halted statuesquely.

There were cogent and fundamental reasons for the tableau—reasons which were carved in imperishable letters across the sluggish coagulation of emotions which Chief Inspector Claud Eustace Teal himself would have been much to diffident to call his soul. They were reasons which went way back through the detective's life to those almost unimaginably distant blissful days before anyone in England had ever heard of the Saint—the days when a policeman's lot had been a reasonably happy one, moving through well ordered groves to a stolid and methodical percentage of success, and there had been no such incalculable filibuster sweeping at intervals into the peaceful scene to tie all averages in knots and ride such rings around the wrath and vengeance of Scotland Yard as had never been ridden before. They were reasons which could have been counted one by one on Mr. Teal's grey hairs; and all of them surged out of his memory in a solid phalanx at such moments as that, when the Saint returned to England after an all too brief absence, and Mr. Teal saw him in London again and knew that the tale was no nearer its end than it had ever been.

All these things came back to burden Mr. Teal's overloaded heart in that moment's motionless stare; and then with a sigh he stepped to the window of the taxi-cab and faced his future stoically.

"Hullo," he said.

The Saint's eyebrows went up in a rising slant of mockery.

"Claud!" he protested. "Is that kind? I ask you, is that a brotherly welcome? Anyone might think you weren't pleased to see me."

"I'm not," said Mr. Teal dourly. "But I shall have to see you."

The Saint smiled.

"Hop in," he invited hospitably. "We're going your way."

Teal shook his head — that is the simplest way of describing the movement, but it was such a perfunctory gesture that it simply looked as if he had thought of making it and had subsequently decided that he was too tired.

"Thanks," he said. "I've got another job to do just now. And you seem to be in good company." His baby blue eyes, restored to their habitual affectation of sleepiness, moved over

the two embarrassed men who flanked the Saint. "You know who you're with boys," he told them. "Watch him."

"Pardon me," said the Saint hastily. "I forgot to do the honours. This specimen on my left is Snowdrop, the Rose of Peckham——"

"All right," said Teal grimly. "I know them. And I'll bet they're going to wish they'd never known you—if they haven't begun wishing it already." The traffic light was at green again, and the hooting of impatient drivers held up behind made the detective step back from the window. "I'll see you later," he said, and waved the taxi on.

The Saint grinned and settled back again, as the cab turned south towards the Park. That chance encounter had set the triumphal capstone on his homecoming: it was the last familiar chord of the old opening chorus, his guarantee that the old days had finally come back in all their glory. The one jarring note was in the sinister implications of Teal's parting speech. Ever frank and open, the Saint sought to compare opinions on the subject.

"It sounds," he murmured, "almost as if Claud Eustace had something on his mind. Didn't it sound that way to you, Snowdrop?"

Nassen was wiping his forehead with a large white handkerchief; and he seemed deaf to the advance. His genteel sensitive soul had been bruised, and he had lost the spirit of such candid camaraderie. He put his handkerchief away and slipped an automatic from his pocket. Simon felt the muzzle probe into his ribs, and glanced down at it with one satirical eyebrow raised.

"You know, you could kill someone with that," he said reprovingly.

"I wish it could be you," said the Rose of Peckham in a tone of passionate earnestness, and relapsed into morbid silence.

Simon chuckled and lighted another cigarette. The gun in his own raincoat pocket rested comfortingly across his thigh, but he saw no need to advertise his own armoury. He watched their route with patient interest — they emerged at Parliament Square, but instead of turning down to the Embankment they circled the square and went back up Victoria Square.

"I suppose you know this isn't the way to Scotland Yard, Snowdrop?" he remarked helpfully.

"This is the way you're going first," Nassen told him.

The Saint shrugged. They turned quickly off Victoria Street and pulled up shortly after-

wards outside a house in one of those almost stupefyingly sombre and respectable squares in the district known to its residents as Belgravia but to the vulgar public, less pretentiously, as Pimlico.

Nassen's colleague got out and went up the steps to ring the bell, and the Saint followed under the unnecessarily aggressive propulsion of Nassen's gun.

The door was opened by one of of the most magnificently majestic butlers that the Saint had ever seen. He seemed to be expecting them, for he stood aside immediately, and the Saint was led quickly through the hall into a spacious library on the ground floor.

"I will inform his lordship of your arrival," said the butler, and left them.

Simon Templar, who had been taking in his surroundings with untroubled i n t e r e s t, turned round as the door closed.

"You ought to have told me we were going to visit a lord, Snowdrop," he said reproachfully. "I'd have put on my Old Etonian suspenders, and washed my neck. I know you washed your neck today, because I can see the line where you left off.

Nassen tugged at his lower lip and simmered audibly, but his woes had passed beyond the remedy of repartee. And he was still smouldering pinkly when Lord Iveldown came in.

Lord Iveldown's name will not go down to history in the company of Gladstone, Disraeli, or the Earl of Chatham. Probably it will not go down to history at all. He was a minor statesman whose work had never been done in the public eye, which was at least a negative blessing for a public eye which has far too much to put up with already. In plain language, which tradition forbids any statesman to use, he was one of those permanent Government officials who do actually run the country while the more publicised politicians are talking about it. He was a big man inclined to paunchiness, with thin grey hair and pince-nez and the aura of stupendous pomposity by which the permanent Government official may instantly be recognised anywhere; and the Saint, whose portrait gallery of excrescences left very little ground uncovered, recognised him at once.

He came in polishing his pince-nez, and took up a position with his back to the fireplace.

"Sit down, Mr. Templar," he said brusquely, and turned to Nassen. "I take it that you failed to find what you were looking for?"

The detective nodded.

"We turned the place inside

out, your lordship, but there wasn't a sign of it. He might have sewn it up inside a mattress or in the upholstery of a chair, but I don't think he would have had time."

"Quite," muttered Lord Iveldown. "Quite." He took off his pince-nez, polished them again, and looked at the Saint. "This is serious matter, Mr. Templar," he said. "Very serious."

"Apparently," agreed the Saint blandly. "Apparently."

Lord Iveldown cleared his throat, and wagged his head once or twice.

"That is why I have been obliged to adopt extraordinary measures to deal with it," he said.

"Such as sending along a couple of fake detectives to turn my rooms inside out?" suggested the Saint languidly.

Lord Iveldown started, peered down at him, and coughed.

"Ah-hum," he said. "You knew they were—ah—fakes?"

"My good ass," said the Saint, lounging more snugly in his armchair, "I knew that the Metropolitan Police had lowered itself a lot by enlisting public school men and what not, but I couldn't quite believe that it had sunk so low as to make inspectors out of herbaceous borders like Snowdrop over there. Besides, I'm never arrested by ordinary inspectors—Chief Inspector Teal himself always comes to see me."

"Then why did you allow Nassen to bring you here?"

"Because I figured I might as well take a gander at you and hear what you had to say. The gander," Simon admitted frankly, "is not quite the greatest thrill I've had since I met Dietrich."

Lord Iveldown cleared his throat again and expanded his stomach, clasping his hands behind his back under his coattails and rocking slightly in the manner of a schoolmaster preparing to deal with a grave breach of the public school code.

"Mr. Templar," he said heavily, "this is a serious matter. A very serious matter. A matter, I might say, of the utmost gravity. You have in your possession a volume which contains certain—ah—statements and—ah—suggestions concerning me—statements and suggestions which, I need scarcely add, are wholly without foundation——"

"As, for instance," said the Saint gently, "the statement or suggestion that when you were Under-Secretary of State for War you placed an order for thirty thousand Lewis guns with a firm whose tender was sixty per cent higher than any other, and enlarged your own bank balance immediately afterwards."

"Gross and damnable falsehoods," persisted Lord Iveldown more loudly.

"As, for instance," said the Saint, even more gently, "the gross and damnable falsehood that you accepted on behalf of the Government a consignment of one million gas-masks which technical experts had already condemned in the strongest language as worse than useless——"

"Foul and calumnious imputations," boomed Lord Iveldown in a trembling voice, "which can easily be refuted, but which if published would nevertheless to some degree smirch a name which hitherto has not been without honour in the annals of this nation. It was only for that reason, and not because I feared that my public and private life could not stand the light of any inquiry whatever that might be directed into it, that I consented to—ah—grant you this interview."

Simon nodded.

"Since your synthetic detectives had failed to steal that book from me," he murmured, "it was —ah—remarkably gracious of you."

His sardonic blue eyes, levelled over the shaft of a cigarette that slanted from between his lips like the barrel of a gun, bored into Lord Iveldown with a light of cold appraisal which made the nobleman shift his feet awkwardly.

"It was an extraordinary situation," repeated his Lordship in a resonant voice, "which necessitated extraordinary measures." He cleared his throat, adjusted his pince-nez, and rocked on his heels again. "Mr. Templar," he said, "let us not beat about the bush any longer. For purely personal reasons—merely, you understand, because I desire to keep my name free from common gossip—I desire to suppress these base insinuations which happen to have come into your possession; and for that reason I have accorded you this personal interview in order to ascertain what—ah—value you would place on this volume."

"That's rather nice of you," said the Saint guardedly.

"If, for example," said Lord Iveldown throatily, "a settlement of, shall we say—ah—two thousand pounds——"

He broke off at that point because suddenly the Saint had begun to laugh. It was a very quiet, self-contained laugh—a laugh that somehow made the blood in Lord Iveldown's hardened arteries run colder as he heard it. If there was any humour in the laugh, it did not reach the Saint's eyes.

"If you mentioned two hundred thousand," said the Saint

coolly, "you would have been right on my figure."

There was a long terrific silence in which the mere rustle of a coat-sleeve would have sounded like the crash of doom. Many seconds went by before Lord Iveldown's dry cough broke the stillness like a mattle of musketry.

"How much did you say?" he articulated hoarsely.

"I said two hundred thousand pounds."

Those arctic blue eyes had never shifted from Lord Iveldown's faintly empurpled face. Their glacial gaze seemed to go through him with the cold sting of a rapier blade – seemed to strip away all his bulwarks of pomposity like tissue, and hold the naked soul of the man quivering on the point like a grub on a pin.

"But that," said Lord Iveldown tremblingly—"that's impossible! That's blackmail"

"I'm afraid it is," said the Saint.

"You sit there, before witnesses——"

"Before all the witnesses you like to bring in. I don't want you to miss the idea, your lordship. Witnesses don't make any difference. In any ordinary case—yes. If I were only threatening to advertise your illicit love affairs, or anything like that, you could bring me to justice and your own name would quite rightly be suppressed. But in a case like this even the Chief Commissioner couldn't guarantee you immunity. This isn't just ordinary naughtiness. This is high treason."

Simon tapped the ash from his cigarette and blew a smoke-ring towards the ceiling; and once again the relentless eyes went back to Lord Iveldown's face. Nassen and the other detective staring at the Saint in sullen silence, felt as if an icy wind blew through the room and the goose-fleshed their skin in spite of the warmth of the evening. The bantering buffoon who had goaded them to the verge of apoplexy had vanished as though he had never existed, and another man spoke with the same voice.

"The book you're talking about," said the Saint, in the same level dispassionate tones, "is a legacy to me, as you know, from Rayt Marius. And you know what made him a millionaire. His money was made from war and the instruments of war. All those amazing millions—the millions out of which you and others like you were paid, Lord Iveldown – were the wages of death and destruction and wholesale murder. They were coined out of blood and dishonour and famine, and the agony

of peaceful nations. Men—and women and children, too—were killed and tortured and maimed to find that money—the money out of which you were paid, Lord Iveldown."

Lord Iveldown licked his lips, and opened his mouth to speak. But that clear ruthless voice went on, cleaving like a sword through his futile attempt at expostulation.

"Since I have that book, I had to find a use for it. And I think my idea is a good one. I am organising the Simon Templar Foundation, which will be started with a capital of one million pounds—of which your contribution will be a fifth. The Foundation will be devoted to the care and comfort of men maimed and crippled in war, to helping the wives and children of men killed in war, and to the endowment of any cause which has a chance of doing something to promote peace in the future. You must agree that the retribution is just."

Iveldown's bluff had gone. He seemed to have shrunk, and was not teetering pompously on the hearth any more. His blotched face was working, and his small eyes had lost all their dominance—they were the mean shifty eyes of a man who was horribly afraid.

"You're mad" he said, and his voice cracked. "I can't listen to anything like that. I won't listen to it You'll change your tune before you leave here, by God! Nassen——"

The two detectives started forward, roused abruptly from their trance; and in the eyes of the Rose of Peckham particularly Simon saw the dawn of a sudden vengeful joy. He smiled, and moved his raincoat a little to uncover the gun in his hand.

"Not just now, Snowdrop," he said smoothly, and the two men stopped. "I have a date, and you've kept me too long already. A little later, I think, you'll get your chance." His gaze roved back to Lord Iveldown's sickly features, on which the fear was curdling to a terrible impotent malevolence; and the Saintly smile touched his lips again for a moment. "I shall expect that two hundred thousand pounds by Saturday night," he said. "I haven't the least doubt that you'll do your best to kill me before then, but I'm equally sure that you won't succeed. And I think you will pay your share . . . ."

Simon Templar was not a light sleeper, by the ordinary definition. Neither was he a heavy one. He slept like a cat, with the complete and perfect relaxation of a wild animal, but with the

same wild animal's gift of rousing into instant wakefulness at the slightest sound which might require investigation. A howling thunderstorm would not have made him stir, but the stealthy slither of a cautiously opened drawer brought him out of a dreamless untroubled slumber into tingling consciousness.

The first outward sign of awakening touched nothing more than his eyelids—it was a trick he had learned many years ago, and it had saved his life more than once. His body remained still and passive, and even a man standing close beside his bed could have detected no change in the regular rate of his breathing. He lay staring into the dark, with his ears strained to pick up and locate the next infinitesimal repetition of the noise which had awoken him.

After a few seconds he heard it again, a sound of the identical quality but from a different source—the faint scuff of a rubber sole moving over the carpet in his living-room. The actual volume of sound was hardly greater than a mouse might have made, but it brought him out of bed in a swift writhing movement that made no sound in response.

And thereafter the blackness of the bedroom swallowed him up like a ghost. His bare feet crossed the floor without the faintest whisper of disturbance, and his fingers closed on the door-knob as surely as if he could seen it. He turned the knob without a rattle, and moved noiselessly across the hall.

The door of the living-room was ajar—he could see the blackness ahead of him broken by a vague nimbus of light that glowed from the gap and shifted his position eratically. He came up to the door softly, and looked in.

The silhouette of a man showed against the darkened beam of an electric torch with the aid of which he was silently and systematically going through the contents of the desk; and the Saint showed his teeth for a moment as he sidled through the doorway and closed the door soundlessly behind him. His fingers found the switch beside the door, and he spoke at the same time.

"Good morrow, Algernon," he murmured.

The man swung round in the sudden blaze of light. At the very moment when he started to turn Simon saw the gun in his hand, and thanked his immortal deities that he had not removed his fingers too promptly from the switch. In a split second he had clicked the lever up again, and the darkness fell again with blinding intensity after that one

dazzling instant of luminance.

The Saint's voice floated once more out of the blackness.

"So you pack a rod, do you, Algernon? You must know that rods aren't allowed in this respectable city. I shall have to speak to you severely about that presently, Algernon—really I shall. . . ."

The beam of the intruder's torch stabbed out again, printing a white circle of light on the door; but Simon was not inside the circle. The Saint had no rooted fear of being cold-bloodedly shot down in that apartment—the chances of a clean getaway for the shooter were too remote—but he had a very sound knowledge of what a startled burglar, amateur or professional, may do in a moment of panic; and what had been visible of the intruder's masked face as he spun round had not been tender or sentimental. Simon heard the man's heavy breathing as the ray of the flashlight moved to left and right of the door and then began with a wilder haste to dance over the other quarters of the room. For the space of about half a minute it was a game of deadly hide-and-seek: the door appeared to be unguarded, but something told the intruder that he would be walking into a trap if he attempted to make a dash for liberty that way. At the end of that time his nerve broke and he plunged desperately for the only visible path of escape, and in so doing found that his suspicions had been almost clairvoyantly accurate.

A weight of teak-like bone and muscle landed on his back with a cat-like spring; steel fingers fastened on his gun hand, and another equally strong hand closed round his throat, driving him remorselessly to the floor. They wrestled voicelessly on the ground, but not for long, Simon got the gun away without a single shot being fired, and flung himself clear of his opponent with an acrobatic twist of his body. Then he found his way to the switch and turned on the lights again.

The burglar looked up at him from the floor, breathing painfully: and Simon permitted the muzzle of the captured gun to settle into a steady aim on the centre of the man's tightly tailored torso.

"You look miserable, Algernon," he remarked affably. "But you couldn't expect to have all the fun to yourself, could you? Come on, my lad—take that old sock off your head and let's see how your face is put together."

The man did not answer or obey, and Simon stepped forward and whipped off the mask with a deft flick of his hand.

Having done which, he remained absolutely motionless for several ticks of the clock.

And then, softly, helplessly, he started to laugh.

"Suffering snakes," he wailed. "If it isn't good old Hoppy Uniatz!"

"Fer cryin' out loud," gasped Mr. Uniatz. "If it ain't de Saint!"

"You haven't forgotten that time, when you took a dive through the window of Rudy's joint on Mott Street?"

"Say, an' dat night you shot up Angie Paletta an' Russ Kovari on Amsterdam Avenue?"

"And you got crowned with a chair and locked in the attic—you remember that?"

Mr. Uniatz fingered his neck gingerly, as though the aches in it brought back memories.

"Say," he protested aggrievedly, "whaddaya t'ink I got for a memory—a sieve?" He beamed again, reminiscently; and then another thought overcast his homely features with a shadow of retrospective alarm. "An' I might of killed you" he said in an awed voice.

The Saint smiled.

"If I'd known it was you, I mightn't have thought this gun was quite so funny," he admitted. "Well, well, well, Hoppy—this is a long way from little old New York. What brings you here?"

Mr. Uniatz scrambled up from the floor, and scratched his head.

"Well, boss," he said, "t'ings never were de same after prohibition went out, over dere. I bummed around fer a while, but I couldn't get in de money. Den I hoid dey was room fer guys like me to start up in London, so I come over. But, hell, boss, dese Limeys dunno what it's all about, fer God's sake. Why, I asks one mob over here what about gettin' a couple typewriters, an' dey t'ink I'm nuts." Mr. Uniatz frowned for a moment, as if the incapability of the English criminal to appreciate the sovereign uses of machine-guns was still preying on his mind. "I guess I must of been given a bum steer," he said.

Simon nodded sympathetically, and strolled across to the table for a cigarette. He had known Hoppy Uniatz many years ago as a seventh-rate gunman of the classical Bowery breed, and had never been able to regard him with the same distaste as he viewed other hoodlums of the same species. Hoppy's outstanding charm was a skull of almost phenomenal thickness, which, while it had protected his brain from fatal injury on several occasions, had by its disproportionate density of bone left so little space for the development of grey matter

that he had been doomed from the beginning to linger in the very lowest ranks of that unintellectual profession; but at the same time it lent to Hoppy's character a magnificent simplicity which the Saint found irresistible. Simon could understand that Hoppy might easily have been lured across the Atlantic by exaggerated rumours of an outbreak of armed banditry in London; but that was not all he wanted to know.

"My heart bleeds for you, Hoppy," he murmured. "But what made you think I had anything worth stealing?"

"Well, boss,' explained Mr. Uniatz apologetically, "it's like dis. I get interdooced to a guy who knows anudder guy who's bein' blackmailed, an' dis guy wants me to get back what ever it is he's bein' blackmailed wit' and maybe bump off de guy who got it. So I'm told to rent an apartment here, an' I got de one next door to you—it's a swell apartment, wit' a bathroom an' everyting. Dat's how I'm able to come in de buildings without de janitor stoppin' me an' askin' who I wanna see."

Simon blew out a thoughtful streamer of smoke—he had overlooked that method of slipping through his defences.

"Didn't they tell you my name," he asked.

"Sure. But all dey tell me is it's a Mr. Templar. When I hear it, I feel somehow I oughta remember de name," said Mr. Uniatz, generously forgetting the indignation with which he had received a recent aspersion on his memory, "but I never knew it was you. Honest, Saint, if I'd of known it was you, it'd of been ixnay on de job, for mine. Ya wouldn't believe anyt'ing else, woujja, boss?"

The Saint shook his head.

"You know, Hoppy," he said slowly, "I don't think I would."

An idea was germinating in his mind—one of those sublimely fantastic ideas that sometimes came to him, an idea whose gorgeous simplicity, even in embryo, brought the ghost of a truly Saintly smile back to his lips. He forgot his interrupted beauty sleep.

"Could you do with a drink, old man?" he asked.

Hoppy Uniatz allowed the breath to hiss between his teeth, and a light of childlike beautitude irradiated his face.

"Boss," he replied, "what couldn't I do wit' a drink?"

Simon refrained from suggesting any answers to the conundrum. He poured out a liberal measure, and saved his soda-water. Mr. Uniatz took the glass, sniffed it, and sucked his saliva

for a moment of disciplined anticipation.

"Don't get me wrong, boss," he said earnestly. "Dose t'ings I said about Limey's wasn't meant about you as a Limey. You've been in New York, an' you know what it's all about. I know we had some arguments over dere, but over on dis side it don't seem de same. Say, I been so lonesome here it makes me feel kinda mushy to have a little fight like we had just now wit' a guy like you, who knows what a Roscoe's for. I wish you an' me could of teamed up before, boss."

The Saint had helped himself to a more modest dose of whisky. He stretched himself out out on the davenport, and waved Mr. Uniatz to an armchair.

"Maybe it's not too late even now, Hoppy," he said; and he had much more to talk about, which kept him out of bed for another two hours.

Chief Inspector Teal arrived while the Saint was finishing a belated breakfast. Simon Templar's breakfasts were usually belated, for he had never been able to appreciate the spiritual rewards of early rising; but on this particular morning the lateness was not entirely his fault. He had already been interrupted twice during the meal, and the bell which heralded the third interruption made him finally abandon a cup of coffee which had abandoned all pretension of being even lukewarm.

"Mr. Teal is here, sir," said Sam Outrell's voice on the telephone; and the Saint sighed.

"Okay, Sam. Send him up." He replaced the microphone and turned back to Mr. Uniatz, who was engulfing quantities of toast with concentrated gusto. "I'm afraid you've got to blow again, Hoppy," he said. "I'll see you later."

Mr. Uniatz rose wearily. He had been shot out of the Saint's apartment to make room for other visitors so often that morning that he had grave fears for his digestion. There was one slice of toast left for which even his gargantuan mouth was temporarily unable to find room. In order to eliminate any further risks of having his meal disturbed, he put the slice in his pocket and went out obediently; and he was the first thing that Teal saw when Simon opened the door.

"Hi, Claud," said Mr. Uniatz amiably, and drifted on towards the sanctity of his own quarters.

"Who the deuce is that?" demanded the startled detective, staring after Hoppy's retreating rear.

The Saint smiled.

"A friend of mine," he said.

"Come along in, Claud, and make yourself uncomfortable. This is just like old times."

Mr. Teal turned round slowly and advanced into the apartment. The momentary human surprise which Hoppy's greeting had given him faded rather quickly out of his rubicund features. The poise of his plump body as he came to rest in the living-room, the phlegmatic dourness of his round pink face under its unfashionable bowler hat, was exactly like old times. It was Chief Inspector Teal paying an official call: Chief Inspector Teal, with the grim recollection of many such calls haunting his mind, trundling doggedly out once again to take up his hopeless duel with the smiling young freebooter before him. The sum of a score of interviews like that drummed through his head, the memory of a seemingly endless sequence of failures and the bitter presentiment of many more to come was in his brain; but there was no hint of weakness or evasion in the somnolent eyes that rested on the Saint's brown face.

"Well," he said, "I told you I'd be coming to see you."

Simon nodded pleasantly.

"It was nice of you to make it so soon, Claud," he murmured. "And what do you think is going to win the Derby?"

He knew as well as the Chief Commissioner himself that Mr. Teal would never have called on him to enjoy small talk and racing gossip; but it was not his business to make the first move. A faint smile of humorous challenge stayed on his lips, and under the light of that smile Teal rummaged in his pockets and pulled out a folded sheet of paper.

"Do you know anything about that?" he asked.

Simon took the sheet and flattened it out. It was his own notehead, and there was certainly no surprise for him in the words which were written on it; but he read the document through obligingly.

The Rt. Hon. Leo Farwill,
384, Hanover Square,
London, W.1.

Dear Sir,

As you have probably been informed, I have in my possession a volume of unique international interest in which your own distinguished name happens to be mentioned.

I have decided to sell this volume, in sections, for the benefit of the Simon Templar Foundation, which I am founding. This foundation will exist for the purpose of giving financial and other assistance to the needy families of men who were killed

or deprived of their livelihood in the last war, to the care of the incurably crippled wounded, and to the endowment of any approved cause which is working to prevent a repetition of that outbreak of criminal insanity.

The price to you, of the section in which your name appears, is £200,000; and, knowing your interest in literature, I am sure you will decide that the price is reasonable—particularly as the Simon Templar Foundation will in its way work towards the promise of "a land fit for heroes to live in" with which you once urged men to military service, death, and disablement, and which circumstances (always, of course, beyond your control) have since made you unable to fulfil.

In expecting your cheque to reach me before next Saturday midnight, I am, I feel sure, my dear honourable Leo, only anticipating your own natural urgent desire to benefit such a deserving charity.

Yours faithfully,

SIMON TEMPLAR.

"Very lucid and attractive, I think," said the Saint politely. "What about it?"

Teal took the letter back from him.

"It's signed with your name, isn't it?" he asked.

"Certainly,' said the Saint.

"And it's in your handwriting?"

"Beyond a doubt."

"So that it looks very much as if you wrote it."

Simon nodded.

"That Sherlock Holmes brain of yours goes straight to the point, Claud," he said. "Faced with such keen deductive evidence, I can't deceive you. I did write it."

Teal folded the letter again and put it back in his pocket. His mouth settled into a relentless line. With any other man than the one who faced him, he would have reckoned the interview practically over; but he had crossed swords with the Saint too often ever to believe that of any interview — had seen too many deadly thrusts picked up like the clumsy lunges of an amateur on the rapier-like brilliance of the Saint's brain, and tossed aside with a smile that was more deadly than any riposte. But the thrust had to be made.

"I suppose you know that's blackmail," Teal said flatly.

The Saint frowned slightly.

"Demanding money with menaces?" he asked.

"If you want the technical charge," Teal said stubbornly, "yes."

And it came—the cool flick of

the rapier that carried his point wide and aimless.

"Where," asked the Saint puzzledly, "are the menaces?"

Teal swallowed an obstruction in his throat. The game was beginning all over again—the futile hammering of his best blades on a stone wall that was as impalpable as ether, the foredoomed pursuit of the brigand who was easier to locate than any other lawbreaker in London, and who was more elusive than a will-o'-the-wisp even when he was most visible in the flesh. All the wrath that curdled his milk of human kindness was back in the detective at that moment, all the righteous anger against the injustice of his fate; but he had to keep it bottled up in his straining chest.

"The menaces are in the letter," he said bluntly.

Simon stroked his chin in a rendering of ingenuous perplexity that acted on Teal's blood-pressure like a dose of strychnine.

"I may be prejudiced," he remarked, "but I didn't see them. It seemed a very respectable appeal to me, except for a certain unconventional familiarity at the end, where Leo's Christian name was used—but these are free and easy days. Otherwise I thought it was a model of restrained and touching eloquence. I have a book, of which it occurs to me that Leo might like to buy the section in which his name appears—you know what publicity-hounds most of these politicians are. Therefore I offer to sell it to him, which I'm sure must be strictly legal."

"Mr. Farwill's statement," retorted Teal, "is that the part of the book you're referring to is nothig but a collection of libellous lies."

Simon raised his eyebrows.

"He must have a guilty conscience," he murmured. "But you can't put me in jail for that. I didn't say anything in my letter to give him that impression. I defy you to fine one threat, one word of abuse, one questionable insinuation. The whole epistle," Simon said modestly, "is couched in the most flattering and even obsequious terms. In expecting his cheque to reach me before next Saturday midnight, I am, I feel sure, only anticipating his own natural urgent desire to benefit such a deserving charity. Leo may have turned out to be not quite the eager philanthropist I took him for," said the Saint regretfully, "but I still hope he'll see the light of godliness in the end; and I don't see what you've got to do with it, Claud."

Mr. Teal gulped in a breath that hurt him as it went down

his windpipe.

"Oh, you don't don't you?" he bit out.

"I'm afraid I don't Claud," said the Saint. "Leo may have been caught in a hysterical moment, but other blokes have had the identical letter without feeling that way about it. Look at this."

He picked up a slip of tinted paper from beside the coffee-pot, and held it out so that the detective could read the words. It was a cheque on the City & Continental Bank, dated that day, and it was made out for two hundred thousand pounds.

"Sir Barclay Edingham came here at half-past nine to give me that—he was in such a hurry to do his share. Major-General Sir Humbolt Quipp blew in at half past ten—he grumbled and thundered a bit about the price, but he's gone away again to think it over, and I'm sure he'll pay it in the end. The other contributors will be coming through in the next day or two, and I wouldn't mind betting that Leo will be one of them as soon as he comes out of his tantrum. You ought to have another talk with him, Claud—it might help him to see the path of duty."

"Never you mind what I ought to do," Teal said hotly. His baby blue eyes, with all the sleepiness knocked out of them, were goggling like young balloons at the cheque which Simon was dangling under his nose, as if his brain had flatly refused to believe their message and they had swollen to twice their normal size with proper indignation at the insult. With a genuine physical effort he averted them from the astounding figures. "Sir Barclay Edingham gave you that?" he repated incredulously.

Simon inclined his head.

"And he was glad to. Sir Barclay Edingham has a very keen appreciation of literature. The pages I sold him are now his most treasured possession, and you couldn't buy them off him for twice as much as he gave me."

He folded the cheque carefully, and put it away in his wallet; and the detective straightened up.

"Where is this book?" he demanded.

The Saint's eyebrows shifted again fractionally. It was a gesture that Teal knew better than any other of the Saint's bar one, and that almost imperceptible change of alignment carried more meaning than a thousand words of description could convey.

"It's in England," he answered.

"That's good," said Teal grimly, "because I want to see it."

The Saint picked up a cigarette, spun it into the air, and caught it in his mouth without moving his head. He snapped a flame from his lighter and blew out a long feather of smoke.

"Do you?" he murmured interestedly.

"Yes, I do!" barked the detective. "And I mean to see it before I go. I mayn't be much of a critic, but I'll soon find out whether this literary work is worth two hundred thousand pounds a chapter. I'll get my own ideas about whether it's libellous. Now, are you going to show me that book or am I going to look for it?"

"Where's your search-warrant?" inquired Simon imperturbably.

Teal gritted his teeth.

"I don't need a search-warrant. You're a suspected person——"

"Only in your wicked suspicious mind, Claud. And I'm telling you that you do need a search-warrant. Or, if you're going to take my home apart without one, you need three or four strong men with you. Because if you try to do it yourself, I shall pick you up by the scruff of your neck and the seat of your pants and throw you over the Ritz, and there's no magistrate in England who could give you a comeback"

The Saint was smiling; but Mr. Teal had no illusions about that smile. It was not a smile of simple-hearted bonhomie and goodwill towards policemen. It was a smile that could have been worn by no one but the lean dangerous privateer who was never more dangerous than when he smiled.

And Mr. Teal knew that he hadn't got a leg to stand on. The Saint had tied him in a knot again. There were no menaces, no threats of any kind, in the letter with which the Honourable Leo Farwill had gone to Scotland Yard—it was a pleasant polite epistle with no unlawful insinuations whatsoever, and any fairly clever advocate could have convinced a normally half-witted jury that the suspicions attached to it arose from nothing but the notorious Simon Templar's signature at the end. And without a definite charge of blackmail, there were no grounds at all for demanding an inspection of the literary work on which the whole case hinged.

Mr. Teal knew all these things as well as anyone—and knew also that in spite of the strictly legal appearances no man had ever given the Saint two hundred thousand pounds except as the reward of some devilish and unlawful cunning that had been born in that gay unscrupulous

brain. He knew all these things as well as he knew his own birthday; but they did not cheer him. And Simon Templar's forefinger went out and tapped him on the stomach in the Saintly gesture that Mr. Teal knew and hated best of all.

"You're too full of naughty ideas and uncharitable thoughts these days," said the Saint. "I was hoping that after I'd been away for a bit you might have got over them; but it seems as if you haven't. You're having one of your relapses into detectivosis, Claud; and it offends me. You stand there with your great stomach wobbling——"

"It doesn't wobble!" yapped the detective furiously.

"It wobbles when I poke it with my finger," said the Saint coldly, and proceeded to demonstrate.

Teal struck his hand aside.

"Now listen," he brayed. "You may be able to twist the law around to suit yourself for a while——"

"I can twist the law around to suit myself as long as I like," said the Saint cheerfully; "and when I fall down on it, it will be soon enough for you to come and see me again. Now you've completely spoiled my breakfast; and I've got an important appointment in ten minutes, so I can't stop to play with you any more. Drop in again next time you wake up, and I'll have some more to say to you."

Chief Inspector Teal settled his bowler hat. The wrath and righteous indignation were steaming together under his waistcoat; but with a terrific effort he recovered his pose of torpid weariness.

"I'll have some more to say to you," he replied curtly, "and it'll keep you out of trouble for several years."

"Let me know when you're ready," murmured the Saint, and opened the door for him with old-world courtesy.

A couple of minutes later, with his wide-brimmed felt hat tipped challengingly over his right eye, he was knocking at the door of the adjoining apartment.

"Come along, Hoppy," he said. "We've left it late enough already—and I can't afford to miss this date."

Mr. Uniatz put down a bottle of whisky regretfully and took up his hat. They left the building by the entrance in Stratton Street; and as they came out on to the pavement a shabby and ancient touring car pulled away from the kerb and went past. Simon felt as if a gust of wind plucked at his swashbuckling headgear and carried it spinning: the crack that went with

the gust of wind might have been only one of the many backfires that a big city hears every hour.

Simon collected his hat and dusted it thoughtfully. The bullet hole made a neat puncture in the centre of the crown—the only mistake in the aim had been the elevation.

The attack surprised him seriously. He had allowed himself to believe that during his possession of *Her Wedding Secret* his life at least was safer than it had ever been—that while the opposition would go to any lengths to obtain that classic, they would be extraordinarily solicitous about his own bodily health. He turned to Mr. Uniatz, and had a sudden spasm of alarm when he saw that enterprising warrior standing out on the edge of the sidewalk with an automatic waving towards the retreating car. Simon made a grab at the gun and whipped it under his coat.

"You everlasting fathead!" he said. "Where the blazes d'you think you are?"

Mr. Uniatz scratched his head and looked around him.

"I t'ink we're in Stratton Street, boss," he said anxiously. "Ain't dat right? I can't seem to find my way around dis town. Why ja grab de Betsy off of me? I could of plugged dat guy easy."

The Saint sighed. By some miracle the street had been practically deserted, and no one appeared to have noticed the brief flourish of gangland armaments.

"Because if you'd plugged that guy you'd have had us both in the hoosegow before you knew what had happened, you poor sap," he said tersely, and slipped the lethal weapon cautiously back into its owner's pocket. "Now keep that Betsy of yours buttoned up until I tell you to let it out—and try to remember which side of the Atlantic you're on, will you?"

They walked round to the garage where Simon kept his car, with Mr. Uniatz preserving a silence of injured perplexity. The ways of the old world were strange to him; and his brain had never been geared to lightning adaptability. If one guy could take a shot at another guy and get away with it, but the other guy couldn't take a shot back at the first guy without being clapped in the hoosegow, what the hell sort of country was this England, for God's sake? There was ust no percentage in trying to hold down a racket in those parts, reflected Hoppy Uniatz, and laboured over the subtleties of this sociological observation for twenty minutes,

while Simon Templar whisked the huge purring Hirondel through the traffic to the south-west.

Simon had a different problem to ponder, and he was inclined to share it.

"Tell me, Hoppy," he said. "Suppose a bloke had some papers that he was blackmailing you with—papers that would be the end of you if they ever came out. Suppose he'd got your signed confession to a murder, or something like that. What would you do about it?"

Mr. Uniatz rubbed his nose.

"'Dat's easy, boss. I'd bump de guy off, sure."

"I'm afraid you would," said the Saint. "But suppose you did bump him off — those papers would still be around somewhere and you wouldn't know who was going to get hold of them next."

This had not occurred to Mr. Uniatz. He frowned gloomily for a while; and then he brightened again as the solution struck him like a ray of sunshine.

"Why boss," he said, "I know what I'd do. After I'd bumped him off, I'd look for de papers."

"And where would you look for them?" asked the Saint.

"In de guy's pocket," said Mr. Uniatz promptly.

"And suppose they weren't there?"

Hoppy sighed. The corrugations of worried thought returned to his brow. Thinking had never been his greatest talent—it was one of the very few things that were capable of hurting his head.

Simon shot the Hirondel between a lorry and an omnibus with the breadth of a finger to spare on either side, and tried to assist.

"I mean, Hoppy," he said, "you might have thought: 'Suppose I bump this guy off. Suppose he isn't carrying the papers in his pocket. Well, when a guy's bumped off, one of the first things the cops want to know is who did it. And one of the ways of finding that out is to find out who might have a reason to do it. And one of the ways of finding that out is to go through his letters and anything else like that you can get hold of. So if you'd thought all that out, Hoppy, you might have decided that if you bumped him off the cops might get hold of the papers, and that wouldn't be too healthy for you."

Mr. Uniatz ruminated over this point for two or three miles, and finally he shrugged.

"I dunno," he said. "It looks like we better not bump off dis guy, at dat. Whadda you t'ink, boss?"

Simon realised that he would

have to be content with his own surmises, which were somewhat disturbing. He had been prepared to bank heavily on his immunity from death, if not from organised discomfort, so long as the ungodly were in doubt about the concurrent fate of *Her Wedding Secret;* but the recent episode was a considerable discouragement to his faith. Leaving aside the possibility that Lord Iveldown had gone completely and recklessly berserk, it meant that the ungodly were developing either a satanic cunning or a denseness of cranium equalled only by that of Hoppy Uniatz.

He made a rough summary of the opposition. They had been five in number originally, and it was only to be expected that out of those five a solid percentage would have been non-resisters. Sir Barclay Edingham had paid. Major-General Sir Humbolt Quipp would pay. The active dissenters consisted of Lord Iveldown, who had already declared his hand, a certain Mr. Neville Yorkland, M.P., with whom the Saint was going to have an interview, and perhaps the Honourable Leo Farwill, who might jump either way. But none of these three gentlemen, undesirable citizens though they might be, could lightly be accused of excessive denseness of cranium. Neither, as a matter of fact, had the Saint been prepared to credit them with talents of satanic cunning; but on that score score it was dawning on him that he might do well to maintain an open mind.

The inevitable triangle possessed a third corner—if anything so nearly spherical could be described as a corner—in the rotund shape of Chief Inspector Claud Eustace Teal. Whatever his other errors may have been, Simon Templar was not guilty of kidding himself that he had finally and eternally disposed of that menace in the brief *tete-a-tete* they had enjoyed that morning.

The Saint, it must be confessed, had sometimes been guilty of deceiving Chief Inspector Teal. He had not always unbosomed all his secrets as Mr. Teal would have liked him to. At times, even, he had deliberately and grievously misled that persistent enforcer of the Law—a breach of the public school code which all English gentlemen will undoubtedly deplore.

He had misled Mr. Teal that morning when telling him that he had an appointment in ten minutes. As a matter of fact, the Saint's appointment was not until that evening, and he had merely been promising himself an idle day in the country on the way, with which he did not pro-

pose to allow Scotland Yard to interfere. It was a casual and almost pointless untruth; but he might have thought more about it if he had forseen its results.

Mr. Teal brooded all day over his problem. In the course of the afternoon he had a second interview with the Honourable Leo Farwill; and that estimable politician's reaction to his report, far from consoling him, made him still more uneasy.

Later that evening he saw the Assistant Commissioner.

"There's something darned funny going on, sir, he summarised his conclusions tentatively.

The Assistant Commissioner sniffed. He had a sniff which annoyed Mr. Teal almost as much as Simon Templar's irreverently prodding forefinger.

"I, in my humble way, had reached the same conclusion," said the Commissioner sarcastically. "Has Farwill said any more?"

"He was just wooden," said Teal. "That's what I don't like about it. If he'd gone off the deep end, ranted about the inefficiency of the police and the questions he was going to ask in Parliament—all the usual stuff, you know—I'd have felt happier about it. That was what I was expecting him to do, but he didn't do it. He seemed to go back into a sort of shell."

"You mean you got the impression that he was rather regretting having gone to the police with that letter?"

Teal nodded.

"It did seem like that. I've seen it happen before, when the Saint's on a job. The fellow may kick up a fuss at first, but pretty soon he shuts down like a clam. Either he pays, or he tries to deal with the Saint on his own. He doesn't ask us to interfere again."

"And yet you haven't the faintest idea why solid and respectable people — public men like Farwill, for instance — crumple up like frightened babies just because this man writes them a letter," remarked the Assistant Commissioner acidly.

The detective twiddled a button on his coat.

"I have got the faintest idea, sir," he said redly. "I've got more than a faint idea. I *know* why they do it. I know why they're doing it now. It's blackmail."

"Do you know, I really believe you've solved the mystery," said the Commissioner, with a mildness that singed the air.

"If I've done that, I've done more than anyone else in this building," retorted Teal heatedly. "But there are plenty of people sitting in their offices criticising me who couldn't have got half as far as I have, even if

that isn't saying much." He glared at his chief stubbornly, while all the accumulated wrath and resentment of a score of such conferences rose up recklessly in his breast and strangled his voice for a moment. "Everybody knows that it's some kind of blackmail, but that doesn't help. We can't prove it. When I produced that letter, Templar simply laughed at me. And he was right. There wasn't a line of blackmail in it—except to anyone who knew what was in that book he mentions."

"Which you failed to find out," said the Commissioner.

"Which I failed to find out," agreed Teal feverishly, "because I'm not a miracle worker, and I never said I was."

The Assistant Commissioner picked up his pen.

"Do you want a search-warrant—is that what all these hysterics are about?" he inquired icily.

Teal gulped.

"Yes, I want a search-warrant!" he exploded defiantly. "I know what it means. The Saint'll probably get around that somehow. When I get there, the book will have disappeared, or it'll turn out to be a copy of *Fairy Tales for Little Girls,* or something. And Edingham and Quipp will get up and swear it was never anything else." Goaded beyond endurance though he was, the detective checked for an instant at the horrific potentialities of his prophecy; but he plunged on blindly. "I've seen things like that happen before, too. I've seen the Saint turn a cast-iron conviction into a cast-iron alibi in ten seconds. I'm ready to see it happen again. I'm ready to see him give the newspapers a story that'll make them laugh themselves sick for two months at my expense. But I'll take that search-warrant!"

"I'll see that you have it in half an hour," said the Assistant Commissioner coldly. "We will discuss your other remarks on the basis of what you do with it."

"Thank you, sir," said Chief Inspector Teal, and left the room with the comfortless knowledge that the last word on that subject was a long way from having been said.

"Gents," announced Mr. Uniatz, from a chest swelling with proper pride, "dis here is my pal Mr. Orconi. Dey calls him Peter de Blood. He's de guy youse guys is lookin' for. He'll fix t'ings. . . ."

From that moment, with those classic words, the immortal gorgeousness of the situation was established for all time. Simon Templar had been in many queer spots before, had cheer-

fully allowed his destiny to be spun giddy in almost every conceivable whirlpool of adventure, but never before had he entered such a portentous conclave to solemnly discuss the manner in which he should assassinate himself; and the sheer ecstatic pulchritude of the idea was prancing balmily through his insides in a hare-brained saraband which only a delirious sense of humour like the Saint's could have appreciated to the full.

He stood with his hands in his pockets surveying the two other members of the conference with very clear blue eyes, and allowing the beatific fruitiness of the scheme which Mr. Uniatz had made possible to squirm rapturously through his system.

"Pleased to meet ya," he drawled, with a perfect gangster intonation that had been learned in more perilous and unsavoury surroundings than a fire-proof air-conditioned movie theatre.

Mr. Neville Yorkland, M.P., fidgeted with his tie and looked vaguely about the room. He was a broad tubby little man, who looked something like a cross between a gentleman farmer and a dilettante artist—an incongruous *souffle* of opposites, with a mane of long untidy hair crowning a vintage-port complexion.

"Well," he said jerkily, "let's sit down. Get to business. Don't want to waste any time."

The Honourable Leo Farwill nodded. He was as broad as Yorkland, but longer; and he was not fussy. His black brows and heavy black moustache were of almost identical shape and dimensions, so that his face had a curiously unfinished symmetry, as if its other features had been fitted quite carelesly into the decisive framework of those three arcs of hair.

"An excellent idea," he boomed. "Excellent. Perhaps we might have a drink as well. Mr.—ah—Orconi——"

"Call me Pete," suggested the Saint affably, "and let's see your liquor.'

They sat, rather symbolically, on opposite sides of the long table in Farwill's library. Hoppy Uniatz gravitated naturally to the Saint's elbow, while Yorkland pulled up a chair beside Farwill.

The Honourable Leo poured sherry into four glasses from a crystal decanter.

"Mr.—er—Uniatz gives us to understand that you are what is known as a—ah—gunman, Mr. Orconi."

"Pete," said the Saint, sipping his drink.

"Ah—Pete," Farwill corrected himself, with visible distaste.

Simon nodded gently.

"I guess that's right," he said. "If there's anyone horning in on your racket, you've come to the guy who can stop him."

"Sure," echoed Hoppy Uniatz, grasping his opportunity and swallowing it in one gulp. "We'll fix him."

Farwill beamed laboriously, and produced a box of cigars.

"I presume that Mr. Uniatz has already acquainted you with the basic motives of our proposition," he said.

"Hoppy told me what you wanted — if that's what you mean," said the Saint succintly, stripping the band from his selected Corona. "This guy Templar has something on you, an' you want him taken off."

"That—ah—might be a crude method of expressing it," rumbled the Honourable Leo. "However, it is unnecessary to go into the diplomatic niceties of the dilemma. I will content myself with suggesting to you that the situation is one of, I might almost say, national moment."

"Tremendous issues involved," muttered Mr. Neville Yorkland helpfully. "World-wide catastrophe. The greatest caution is called for. Tact. Secrecy. Emergency measures."

"Exactly," concluded Farwill. "Emergency measures. The ordinary avenues are closed to us by the exigencies of the crisis. You would, in fact, find yourself in the position of an unofficial secret service agent—taking your own risks, fighting your own battles, knowing that in the event of failure you will be disowned by your employers. The situation, in short, calls for a man who is able to take care of himself, who is prepared to endanger his life for a reasonable reward, who—who——"

"I get it," said the Saint blandly. "This guy Templar has something on you, an' you want him taken off."

Farwill compressed his lips.

"At this stage of developments, I feel called upon neither to confirm that statement nor repudiate it," he said with the fluency of many years in Parliament. "The points at issue are, first, whether you are a suitable man for the mission——"

"Nuts," said the Saint tersely. "You want a guy like me, an' I'm the guy you want. When do you cut the cackle an' come to the hosses?"

The Honourable Leo glanced despairing at Yorkland, as if appealing to the Speaker on a point of order. Yorkland twiddled his thumbs.

"Should be all right," he mumbled. "Looks the type. Vouched for by Mr. Uniatz. Been to America myself. Can't pick and choose. Got to decide."

"Ah, yes," admitted Farwill despondently, as if the very idea violated all his dearest principles. "We have got to decide." He inflated his chest again for the only outlet of oratory that was left to him. "Well, Mr. Orconi—ah—Pete, you are doubtless familiar with the general outline of the engagement. This book, of which Mr. Uniatz must have told you, must be recovered—whether by guile or force is immaterial. Nothing must be permitted to obstruct a successful consummation of the undertaking. If, in the course of your work, it should prove necessary to effect physical injuries upon this man Templar, or even to—er—expedite his decease, humanitarian considerations must not influence our firmness. Now, I would suggest that a fee of two hundred pounds——"

Simon straightened up in his chair and laughed rudely.

"Say, whaddaya think I'm lookin' for?" he demanded. "Chicken feed?"

The Honourable Leo drew further breath for eloquence, and the argument was on. It would scarcely be profitable to record it in detail. It went on for a long time, conducted on the Parliamentary side in rounded periods which strayed abstractedly to every other subject on earth except the one in hand and nearly sent the Saint to sleep. But Simon Templar had a serene determination of his own which could even survive the soporific flatulence of Farwill's long-winded verbiage; he was in no hurry, and he was still enjoying himself hugely. Hoppy Uniatz, endowed with a less vivid appreciation of the simple jests of life, did actually fall into a doze.

At long last a fee of two thousand pounds was agreed on; and the Saint helped himself to a glass of sherry.

"Okay, boys," he murmured. "We'll get that guy."

"Sure," echoed Mr. Uniatz, rousing with a snort. "We'll get him."

Yorkland shuffled about on the edge of his seat, buttoned and unbuttoned his coat, and got up.

"Very well," he stuttered. "That's settled. Glad it's all fixed up. Now I must get back to to town. Late already. Important meetings." His restless eyes glanced at the other member of his side. "Count on me for my share, Farwill."

The Honourable Leo nodded.

"Certainly," he reverberated. "Certainly. You may leave it to me to arrange the details." He drew the sherry decanter towards him and replaced the stopper unobstrusively but firm-

ly. "I think we owe a vote of thanks to Mr. Uniatz for the—er—introduction."

Simon Templar surveyed him dispassionately over a second Corona.

"You owe more than that, fella," he said.

Farwill coughed.

"I thought the—er—honorarium was payable when the commission had been — ah — executed."

"Half of it is," agreed the Saint pleasantly. "The first half is payable now. I done business with politicians before. You made so many promises in your job, you can't expect to remember 'em all."

"Sure," seconded Hoppy Uniatz heartily. "Cash wit' order is de rule in dis foim."

Farwill drew out his wallet grudgingly; but it was stocked with a supply of currency which indicated that some such demand had not been unforeseen. He counted out a number of bank-notes with reluctant deliberation; and Yorkland watched the proceeding with a hint of hollowness in his round face.

"Well," he said with a sigh, "that's done. Send you a cheque tonight, Farwill. Thanks. Really must be off now. Excuse me. Goodbye."

He shook hands all round, with the limp perfunctory grip of the professional handshaker, and puttered out of the room; and they heard his car scrunching away down the drive.

The Saint smiled to himself, and raked in the money. He counted it into two piles, pushed one towards Hoppy Uniatz, and folded the other into his pocket. There were five hundred pounds in his own share—it was a small enough sum as the Saint rated boodle, but there were circumstances in which he could take a fiver with just as much pleasure as he would have taken five thousand. It was not always the amount of the swag, it was the twist of the game by which it was collected; and beyond all doubt the twist by which that five hundred had been pulled in ranked high in the scale of pure imponderable delights. On such an occasion, even a purely nominal allowance of loot was its own reward; but still the Saint had not achieved everything that had been in his mind when he set out on that soul-satisfying jag.

One other riddle had been working in his brain ever since he left his apartment that morning, and he led up to it with studied casualness.

"The job's as good as done, Leo," he said.

"Sure," echoed the faithful

Mr. Uniatz. "De guy is dead an' buried."

"Excellent," responded Farwill formally. "Ah—excellent."

He had almost got the decanter away when Simon reached it with a long arm. Farwill winced, and averted his eyes.

"This ain't such bad stuff, Leo," the Saint commented kindly, emptying his glass and refilling it rapidly. He spilt an inch of ash from his cigar on to the carpet, and cocked one foot on to the polished table with a callous disregard for his host's feelings which he felt would go well with the imaginary character of Pete de Blood, and which soothed his own sleepless sense of mischief at the same time. "About this guy, Templar," he said. "Suppose I do have to rub him out?"

"Rub him out?" repeated Farwill dubiously. "Ah—yes, yes. Suppose you have to kill him." His eyes shifted for a moment with the hunted look of the politician who scents an attempt to commit him to a definite statement. "Well, naturally it is understood that you will look after yourself."

"Aw, shucks," said the Saint scornfully. "I can look after myself. That ain't what I mean. I mean, suppose he was rubbed out, then there wouldn't be any way to find out where the book was, an' the cops might get it."

Farwill finally collared the decanter and transported it in an absent-minded way to the cellaret, which he locked with the same preoccupied air. He turned round and clasped his hands under his coat-tails.

"From our point of view, the problem might be simplified," he said.

The Saint rolled his cigar steadily between his finger and thumb. The question with which he had taxed the imagination of Mr. Uniatz had been propounded again where it might find a more positive reply; but the Saint's face showed no trace of his eagerness for a solution. He tipped the dialogue over the brink of elucidation with a single impassive monosyllable.

"How?"

"The Saint has a—ah—confederate," said Farwill, looking at the ceiling. "A young lady. We understand that she shared his confidence in all his—ah—enterprises. We may therefore assume that she is cognisant of the whereabouts of the volume in question. If the Saint were—ah—removed, therefore," Farwill suggested impersonally, "one would probably have a more—ah—tractable person with whom to deal."

A flake of ash broke from the Saint's cigar and trickled a dusty

trail down his coat; but his eyes did not waver.

"I get you," he said.

The simplicity of the argument hit him between the eyes with a force that almost staggered him. Now that it has been put forward, he couldn't understand how he had failed to see it himself from the beginning. It was so completely and brutally logical. The Saint was tough: everyone knew it, everyone admitted it. And he held the whip-hand. But he could be—ah—removed; and the whip would pass into the hands of one lone girl. Undoubtedly, the problem might be simplified. It would be reduced to an elementary variant of an old game of which the grim potentialities were still capable of sending a cold trickle down his spine. He should have seen it at once. His hat hung in the hall with a bullet-punched ventilation through the crown which was an enduring testimony that the opposition had neither gone berserk nor sunk into the depths of imbecility: without even charting the pinnacles of satanic cunning, they had merely grasped at the elusive obvious—which he himself had been too wooden-headed to see.

"That's a great idea," said the Saint softly. "So after we've rubbed out this guy Templar, we go after his moll."

"Ah—yes," assented Farwill, staring into the opposite corner as if he were not answering the question at all. "If that should prove necessary—ah—yes."

"Sure," chirped Mr. Uniatz brightly, anticipating his cue. "We'll fix de goil."

The Saint silenced him with a sudden shift of ice-blue eyes. His voice became even softer, but the change was too subtle for Farwill to notice it.

"Who thought of that great idea?" he asked.

"It was jointly agreed," said the Honourable Leo evasively. "In such a crisis, with such issues at stage, one cannot be sentimental. The proposition was received with unanimous approval. As a matter of fact, I understand that an abortive attempt has already been made in that direction—I should perhaps have explained that there is another member of our—er—coalition who was unfortunately unable to be present at our recent discussion. I expect him to arrive at any moment, as he is anxious to make your acquaintance. He is a gentleman who has already done valuable independent work towards this — ah — consummation which we all desire."

The Saint's eyebrows dropped one slow and gentle quarter-inch over his steady eyes.

"Who is he?"

Farwill's mouth opened for another elaborate paragraph; but before he had voiced his preliminary "Ah" the headlights of a car swept across the drawn blinds and the gravel scraped again outside the windows. Footsteps and voices sounded in the hall, and the library door opened to admit the form of the Honourable Leo's butler.

"Lord Iveldown," he announced.

Simon Templar's cigar had gone out. He put it down carefully in an ashtray, and took out his cigarette-case. It stands as a matter of record that at that moment he did not bat an eyelid, though he knew that the showdown had arrived.

"Delighted to see you, Iveldown," the Honourable Leo was exclaiming. "Yorkland was unfortunately unable to stay. However, you are not too late to make the acquaintance of our new—ah—agents. Mr. Orconi . . ."

Farwill's voice trailed hesitantly away. It began to dawn on him that his full-throated flow of oratory was not carrying his audience with him. Something, it seemed, was remarkably wrong.

Standing in front of the door which had closed behind the retiring butler, Lord Iveldown and Mr. Nassen were staring open-mouthed at the Saint with the aspect of a comedy unison dance team arrested in mid-flight. The rigidity of their postures, the sag of their lower jaws, the glazed bulging of their eyes, and the suffusion of red in their complexions, were so ludicrously identical that they might have been reflections of each other. They looked like two peas who had fallen out of their pod and were still trying to realize what had hit them; and the Honourable Leo looked from them to the Saint and back again with a frown of utter bewilderment.

"Whatever is the matter?" he demanded, startled into uttering one of the shortest sentences of his life; and at the sound of his question Lord Iveldown came slowly and painfully out of his paralysis.

He turned, blinking through his pince-nez.

"Is that—that—the American gunman you told me about?" he queried awfully.

"That is what I have been—ah—given to understand," said Farwill, recovering himself. "We are indebted to Mr. Uniatz for the introduction. I am informed that he has had an extensive career in the underworld of—ah—Pittsburg. Do you imply that you are already acquainted?"

His lordship swallowed.

"You bumptious blathering ass!" he said.

Simon Templar uncoiled himself from his chair with a genial smile. The spectacle of two politicians preparing to speak their minds candidly to one another was so rare and beautiful that it grieved him to interrupt; but he had his own part to play. It had been no great effort to deny himself the batting of an eyelid up to that point—the impulse to bat eyelids simply had not arisen to require suppressing. Coming immediately on the heels of Leo Farwill's revelation, he was not sorry to see Lord Iveldown.

"What ho, Snowdrop," he murmured cordially. "Greetings, your noble lordship."

Farwill gathered himself together.

"So you are already acquainted," he rumbled with an effort of heartiness. "I thought——"

"Do you know who that is?" Iveldown asked dreadfully.

Some appalling intuition made Farwill shake his head; and the Saint smiled encouragingly.

"You tell him, Ivelswivel," he urged. "Relieve the suspense."

"That's the Saint himself," exploded Iveldown.

There are times when even this talented chronicler's genius stalls before the task of describing adequately the reactions of Simon Templar's victims. Farwill's knees drooped and his face took on a greenish tinge; but in amplification of those simple facts a whole volume might be written in which bombshells, earthquakes, dynamite, mule-kicks, and other symbols of devastating violence would reel through a kaleidoscope of similes that would still amount to nothing but an anaemic ghost of the sight which rejoiced Simon Templar's eyes. And the Saint smiled again, and lighted his cigarette.

"Of course we know each other," he said. "Leo and I were just talking about you, your lordship. I gather that you're not only the bird who suggested bumping me off so that you'd only have Patrica Holm to deal with, but your little pal Snowdrop was the bloke who tried it on this morning, and wrecked a perfectly good hat with his rotten shooting. I shall have to add a fiver on to your account for that, brother; but the other part of your brilliant idea isn't so easily dealt with."

Farwill's face was turning from green to grey.

"I seem to have made a mistake," he said flabbily.

"A pardonable error," said the Saint generously. "After all, Hoppy Uniatz didn't exactly give you an even break. But you didn't make half such a big mis-

take as Comrade Iveldown over there——"

Out of the corner of his eye he saw Nassen make a slight movement, and his hand had flashed to his pocket before he remembered that he had set out to enjoy his joke with so much confidence that he had not even gone heeled. But even if there had been a gun there, he would have reached it too late. Nassen had a hand in his coat pocket already; and there was a protuberance under the cloth whose shape Simon knew only too well.

He looked round and saw the reason for it. The ponderous thought processes of Hoppy Uniatz had at last reduced the situation to terms which he could understand. In his slow but methodical way, Mr. Uniatz had sifted through the dialogue and action, and arrived at the conclusion that something had gone amiss. Instinct had made him go for his gun; but the armchair in which he was ensconced had impeded his agility on the draw, and Nassen had forestalled him. He sat with his right hand still tangled in his pocket, glaring at the lanky stillness of Iveldown's private detective with self-disgust writtel all over his face.

"I'm sorry boss," he growled plaintively. "De guy beat me to it."

"Never mind," said the Saint. "It's my fault."

Iveldown came forward, with his mouth twitching.

"The mistake could have been worse," he said. "At least we have the Saint. Where is Yorkland?"

Farwill chewed his lower lip.

"I believe he could be intercepted. When he first arrived, he told me that he had meant to call on Lady Bredon at Camberley on his way down, but he had not had time. He intimated that he would do so on his way back——"

-"Telephone there," snapped Iveldown.

He strode about the room, rubbing his hands together under his coat-tails, while Farwill made the call. He looked at the Saint frequently, but not once did he meet Simon's eyes. Simon Templar never made the mistake of attributing that avoidance of his gaze to fear : at that moment, Iveldown had less to fear than he had ever had before. Watching him with inscrutable blue eyes, the Saint knew that he was looking at a weak pompous egotistical man whom fear had turned into a jackal at bay.

"What message shall I leave?" asked Farwill, with his hand over the transmitter.

"Tell them to tell him—we've caught our man," said Iveldown.

The Saint blew a smoke-ring.

"You seem very sure about that, brother," he remarked. "But Snowdrop doesn't look too happy about that gun. He looks as if he was afraid it might go off—and do you realise, Snowdrop, that if it did go off it'd burn a hole in your beautiful Sunday suit, and Daddy would have to smack you?"

Nassen looked at him whitely.

"Leave him to me," he said. "I'll make him talk."

Simon laughed shortly.

"You might do it if you're a ventriloquist," he said contemptuously. "Otherwise you'd be doing good business if you took a tin cent for your chance. Get wise to yourself, Snowdrop. You've lost your place in the campaign. You aren't dealing with a girl yet. You're talking to a man—if you've any idea what that means."

Lord Iveldown stood aside, with his head bowed in thought, as if he scarcely heard what was going on. And then suddenly he raised his eyes and looked at the Saint again for the first time in a long while; and, meeting his gaze, Simon Templar read there the confirmation of his thoughts. His fate lay in the hands of a creature more ruthless, more vindictive, more incalulable than any professional killer—a weak man, shorn of his armour of pomposity, fighting under the spur of fear.

"The mistake could have been worse," Iveldown repeated.

"You ought to be thinking about other things," said the Saint quietly. "This is Friday evening; and the sun isn't standing still. By midnight tomorrow I have to receive your contribution to the Simon Templar Foundation—and yours also, Leo. And I'm telling you again that whatever you do and whatever Snowdrop threatens, wherever I am myself and whether I'm alive or dead, unless I've received your cheques by that time Chief Inspector Teal will get something that at this moment he wants more than anything else you could offer him. He'll get a chance to read the book which I wouldn't let him see this morning."

"But meanwhile we still have you here," said Lord Iveldown, with an equal quietness that contrasted strangely with the nervous flickers that jerked across his mottled face. He turned to his host. "Farwill, we must go to London at once. Miss Holm will be—ah—concerned to hear the news."

"She has a great sense of humour," said the Saint metallically, but his voice sounded oddly in his own ears.

Iveldown shrugged.

"That remains to be seen. I believe that it wil be comparatively easy to induce her to listen to reason," he said thoughtfully; and the Saint's blood went cold.

"She won't even listen to you," he said, and knew that he lied.

Lord Iveldown must have known it too, for he paid no attention. He turned away without answering, gathering his party like a schoolmaster rallying a flock of boys.

"Nassen, you will remain here and guard these two. When Mr. Yorkland arrives, explain the developments to him, and let him do what he thinks best. . . . Farwill, you must find some pretext to dismiss your servants for the night. It will avoid difficulties if Nassen is compelled to exercise force. We will leave the front door open so that Yorkland can walk in. . . ."

"Mind you don't catch cold," said the Saint in farewell.

He smoked his cigarette through, and listened to the hum of Lord Iveldown's car going down the drive and fading away into the early night.

Not for a moment since Iveldown walked into the room had he minimised his danger. Admittedly it was easier to be distantly responsible for the deaths of ten thousand unknown men than to directly order the killing of one; yet Simon knew that Lord Iveldown, who had done the first many years ago, had in the last two days slipped over a borderline of desperation to the place where he would be capable of the second. The fussiness, the pretentious speech, the tatters of pomposity which still clung to him and made his outwardly ridiculous, made no difference. He would kill like a sententious ass; but still he would kill. And something told the Saint that the Rose of Peckham would not be unwilling to do the job at his orders.

He lighted another cigarette and paced the room with the smooth nerveless silence of a cat. It was queer, he thought, how quickly and easily, with so little melodrama, an adventurer's jest could fall under the shadow of death; and he knew how utterly false to human psychology were the ranting bullying villains who committed the murders in fiction and films. Murder was so rarely done like that. It was done by heavy, grandiose, flabby, frightened men—like Lord Iveldown or the Honourable Leo Farwill or Mr. Neville Yorkland, M.P. And it made no difference that Simon Templar, who had often visualised himself being murdered, had a futile angry objection to

being murdered by pettifogging excrescences of that type.

They would have no more compunction in dealing with Patricia. Perhaps less.

That was the thought which gnawed endlessly at his mind, infinitely more than any consideration of his own danger. The smooth nerveless silence of his own walking was achieved only by a grim effort of will. His muscles strained against it; a savage helplessness tore at his nerves while the minutes went by. Farwill and Iveldown had seventy-five miles to go; and with every minute his hope of overtaking them, even with his car and brilliant driving, was becoming more and more forlorn.

He glanced at Hoppy Uniatz. Mr. Uniatz was sitting hunched in his chair, his fists clenched, glowering at Nassen with steady unblinking malevolence. In Hoppy's philosophy, there could be only one outcome to what had happened and his own failure on the draw. There was no point in revolving schemes of escape; the chance to put them into practice was never given. The only question to be answered was—how long? His wooden nerves warping under the strain of the long silence, he asked it.

"Well," he growled, "when do we go for this ride?"

"I'll tell you when the time comes," said Nassen.

The Saint pitched away his cigarette and lighted yet another. Nassen was alone. There were two of them; and nobody had thought to take Hoppy's gun away. If Hoppy could only get a second chance to draw—if Nassen's nerves could be played on, skilfully and relentlessly, until it became a question of which side could outlast the other. . . .

"What does it feel like to be monarch of all you survey, Snowdrop?" he asked. "Doesn't it make your little heart go pit-a-pat? I mean, suppose Hoppy and I suddenly decided we didn't love you any more, and we both jumped up together and slapped you?"

"You'd better not try," said Nassen. "I'd be glad of the excuse."

He spoke with a cold stolidity that made the Saint stop breathing for a moment. Not until then, perhaps, had he admitted to himself how hopeless was the idea which had crossed his mind—hopeless, at least, to achieve any results in time for it to be worth the effort.

He halted in front of Nassen, gazing at him over the gun between them. So there was only one way left. Nassen could not possibly miss him; but he might be held long enough to give

Hoppy Uniatz a chance. And after that, Hoppy would have to carry the flag. . . .

"You know that would be murder, don't you, Snowdrop?" he said slowly, without a flinch of fear in his bleak watchful eyes.

"Would it?" said Nassen mincingly. "For all anyone would ever know, you're a couple of armed burglars caught red-handed. Your record at Scotland Yard will do the rest. Don't forget whose house this is——"

He broke off.

Another pair of headlights had flashed across the windows; and a car, frantically braked, skidded on the gravel outside. A bell rang in the depths of the house; the knocker hammered impatiently; then came the slight creak of the front door opening. Every movement of the man outside could be pictured from the sounds. The unlatched door moved when he plied the knocker; he looked at it for a moment in indecision—took the first hesitant step into the hall—hurried on. . . .

Nassen was listening too. And suddenly the Saint realised that the chance he had never looked for, the chance he had never thought of, had been given him. Nassen's attention was distracted—he, too, had been momentarily fascinated by the imaginary picture that could be deduced from the sequence of sounds. But he recovered less quickly than the Saint. And Simon's fist had already been clenched for a desperate blow when the interruption came.

The Saint launched it.

Snowdrop, the Rose of Peckham, was never very clear in his mind about what happened. He was not by nature addicted to physical violence of the cruder sort; and no experience of that kind had ever come his way before to give him a standard of comparison. He saw a bony fist a few inches from his face, travelling towards him with appalling speed; and his mouth opened. The fist shut it again for him, impacting on the point of his chin with a crack that seemed to jar his brain against the roof of his skull. And beyond that there was nothing but a great darkness filled with the hum of many dynamos. . . .

Simon caught him by the coat lapels and eased him silently to the floor, gathering up the automatic as he did so. And then the door burst open and the rounded rabbit features of Mr. Neville Yorkland looked into the room.

"Hullo," he stuttered. "What's happened? Got Lord Iveldown's message. Said he'd caught our man." His weak blinking eyes travelled all over the room and

came to rest on the prostrate form of the slumbering Nassen. He pursued his lips. "Oh I see. Is this——"

The Saint straightened up; and a slow godless gleam came into his blue gaze.

"That's the guy," he said, in the accents of Pete the Blood. "Hoppy an' me was just waitin' to see ya before we scram. We gotta get on to London—Lord Iveldown wants us there!"

Patricia Holm was waiting for the Saint when the telephone bell rang to announce the penultimate round of that adventure.

"It's that detective, miss," said Sam Outrell hoarsely. "Mr. Teal. An' he's got another detective with him. They wouldn't wait for me to ask if they could go up."

The girl's heart missed a beat; and then she answered quite quietly:

"All right, Sam. Thanks. Tell Mr. Templar as soon as you see him—if they haven't gone before he comes in."

She put down the receiver, and picked up the cigarette which she had been about to light. She looked about the room while she put a match to it—her hand was steady, but her breath was coming a little faster. She had walked with Simon Templar in the ways of lawlessness to long to be flung into panic; but she know that she was on trial. The Saint had not come back, and he had sent no message; his habits had always been too eratic for a thing like that to frighten her, but this time she was left to hold the fort alone, with no idea of what he had done or was doing or what his plans might be. The only thing she could be sure of was that Chief Inspector Teal had not arrived for the second time that day, bringing another detective with him, on a purely social call.

The book, *Her Wedding Secret*, lay on the table. Patricia picked it up. She had to think—to think quickly and calmly, building up deduction and proprecy and action, as the Saint himself would have done. Simon had left the book there. He had not troubled to move it when Nassen came. But Teal—Teal and another man . . . The bell of the apartment rang while she was still trying to reach a conclusion. There was an open bookcase beside the fireplace, and with a sudden tightening of her lips she thrust the book in among the row of novels on the bottom shelf. She had no time to do anything more; but she was desperately conscious of the inadequacy of what she had done.

Chief Inspector Teal did not know it. He looked across the threshold with affectedly weary eyes at the slim startling beauty of the girl who even to his phlegmatic unimpressionable mind was more like a legendary princess than any woman he had ever seen; who for reasons not utterly beyond his understanding had chosen to give up the whole world that she might have queened to become the companion in outlawry of a prince of buccaneers; and he saw in her blue eyes, so amazingly like the Saint's own, the same light of flickering steel with which Simon Templar had greeted him so many times.

"Good evening, Miss Holm," he said sleepily. "I think you know me; and this is Sergeant Barrow. We have a warrant to search this apartment."

He held out the paper; and she glanced at it and handed it back.

"Mr. Templar isn't in," she said coolly. "Hadn't you better call back later?"

"I don't think so," said Mr. Teal, and walked past her into the hall.

She closed the door and followed the two detectives into the living-room. Mr. Teal took off his bowler hat and put it on the table—it was the only concession he made to her presence.

"We may as well start here," he said to Barrow. "Go over the usual places first."

"Would you like to borrow the vacuum cleaner," inquired Patricia sweetly, "or will you just use your heads?"

"We'll manage," said Teal dourly.

He was more keyed up than he would have cared to admit. The Assistant Commissioner's parting speech still rang in his ears; the resentment of many other similar interviews rang carillons through his brain. He was a man of whom Fate had demanded many martyrdoms. In doing his duty he had to expose himself ot the stinging shafts of Saintly irreverence, and afterwards he had to listen to the acidulated comments of the Assistant Commissioner; and there were days when he wondered whether it was worth it. Sometimes he wished that he had never been a policeman.

Patricia stood around and watched the progress of the search with a trip-hammer working under her ribs and a sinking sensation in her stomach. And in a frightful hopeless way she realised that it was not going to fail. It was not a hurried haphazard ransacking of drawers and cupboards like Nassen and his colleague had conducted. It was thorough, systematic, scien-

tific, ordered along the rigid lines of a training that had reduced hiding places to a tabulated catalogue. It would not glance at the cover of a book and pass on. . . .

She knew that even before Barrow came to the bookcase and began to pull out the books one by one, opening them and flicking over the pages without looking at the titles. . . .

What would the Saint have done?

Patricia didn't know. Her face was calm, almost unnaturally calm; but the trip-hammer under her ribs was driving her into the clutches of a maddening helplessness that had to be fought off with all her will power. There was an automatic in the bedroom: if she could only put over some excuse to reach it. . . . But the Saint would never have done that. Teal had his warrant. He was within his rights. Violence of any kind would achieve nothing—nothing except to aggravate the crash when it came.

Barrow had reached the second row of books. He was halfway through it. He had finished it. The first two shelves were stripped, and the books were heaped up untidily on the floor. He was going on to the third.

What would the Saint have done?

If only he could arrive! If only the door would open, and she could see him again, smiling and unaccountable and debonair, grasping the situation with one sweep of lazy blue eyes and finding the riposte at once It would be something wild and unexpected, something swift and dancing like sunlights on open water, that would turn everything upside down in a flash and leave him mocking in command with his forefinger driving gaily and unanswerably into Teal's swelling waistcoat; she knew that, but she could not think what it would be. She only knew that he had never been at a loss—that somehow, madly, magnificently, he could always retrieve the lost battle and snatch victory from under the very scythe of defeat.

Barrow was down to the third shelf.

On the table were the bottle of beer and the glass which she had set out ready for him—the glass over which his eyes should have been twinkling while he harried the two detectives with his remorseless wit. Her hands went out and took up the bottle and the opener, as she would have done for the Saint if he had walked in.

"Would you care for a drink?" she asked huskily.

"No, thank you, Miss Holm," said Teal politely, without look-

ing at her.

She had the opener fitted on the crown cap. The bottle opened with a soft hiss before she fully realised that she had done it. She tried to picture the Saint standing on the other side of the table—to make herself play the scene as he would have played it.

"Excuse me if I have one," she said.

The full glass was in her hand. She sipped it. She had never cared for beer, and involuntarily she grimaced. . . .

Teal heard a gasp and a crash behind him, and whirled round. He saw the glass in splinters on the table, the beer flowing across the top and pattering down on the carpet, the girl clutching her throat and swaying where she stood, with wide horrified eyes.

"What's the matter?" he snapped.

She shook her head, and swallowed painfully before she spoke.

"It . . . burns," she got out in a whisper. "Inside. . . . Must have been something in it. . . . Meant for . . . Simon. . . ."

Then her knees crumbled and she went down.

Teal went to her with surprising speed. She was writhing horribly, and her breath hissed sobbingly through her clenched teeth. She tried to speak again, but she could not form the words.

Teal picked her up and laid her on the chesterfield.

"Get on the phone," he snarled at Barrow with unnatural harshness. "Don't stand there gaping. Get an ambulance."

He looked about him awkwardly. Water—that was the first thing. Dilute the poison—whatever it was. With a sudden setting of his lips he lumbered out of the hoom.

Patricia saw him go.

Sergeant Barrow was at the telephone, his back towards her. And the bookcase was within a yard of her. Writhing as she was, the sound of one movement more or less would not be noticed. There was no need for stealth—only for speed.

She rolled over and snatched *Her Wedding Secret* from its place in the bottom shelf. Barrow had been to practical—too methodical. He had not looked at titles. With a swift movement she lifted the first three volumes of one of the inspected piles which he had stacked on the floor, and thrust the book underneath. . . .

"Thank you," said Teal's drowsy voice.

He was standing in the doorway with a grim gleam of triumph in his eyes; and he had

not even got a glass of water in his hand. She realised that he had never gone for one. He had thought too fast.

Barrow was gaping at him stupidly.

"You can cancel that call," said Teal shortly.

Patricia sat up and watched him cross the room and pick the book out of the pile. The trip-hammer under her ribs had stopped work abruptly; and she knew the fatalistic quiet of ultimate defeat. She had played and lost. There was no more to do.

Mr. Teal opened the book with hands that were not quite steady. The realisation of succes made him fumble nervously —it was a symptom which amazed himself. He learned then that he had never really hoped to succeed; that the memory of infinite failures had instilled a subconscious presentiment that he never could succeed. Even with the book in his hands, he could not quite believe that the miracle had happened.

It was in manuscript—he saw that in a moment. Manuscript written in a minute pinched hand that crowded an astonishing mass of words on to the page. Methodically he turned to the beginning.

The first page was in the form of a letter.

Villa Philomene,
Nice,
A.M.

My dear Mr. Templar,

It is some time now since we last met, but I have no fear that you will have forgotten the encounter. Lest it should have slipped my mind at the time, let me immediately pay you the tribute of saying that you are the only man in the world who has successfully frustrated my major plans on two occasions, and who has successfully circumvented my best efforts to exterminate him.

It is for this reason that, being advised that I have not many more months to live, I am sending you this small token of esteem in the shape of the first volume of my memoirs.

In my vocation of controller of munition factories, and consequently as the natural creator of a demand for their products, I have had occasion to deal with other Englishmen, fortunately in a more amicable manner than you would permit me to deal with you. In this volume, which deals with certain of my negotiations in England before and during the last World War, you will find detailed and fully documented accounts of a few notable cases in which prominent countrymen of your failed to view my activities with that viol-

ent and unbusiness-like distaste which you yourself have more than once expressed to me.

The gift has, of course, a further object than that of diminishing any insular prejudices you may have.

At the same time as this book is sent to you, there will be sent, to the gentlemen most conspicuously mentioned in these notes, letters which will inform them into whose hands the book has fallen. After reading it yourself, you will see that this cannot fail to cause them great perturbation.

Nevertheless, while it would be simpler for you to allay their alarm and assure your own safety from molestation, I cannot foresee that a man such as I recall you to be would so tamely surrender such a unique opportunity to apply moral pressure towards the righting of what you consider to be wrongs.

I therefore hope to leave behind me the making of a most diverting contest which my experiments in international diplomacy may have excelled in dimension but can scarcely have excelled in quality. And you will understand, I am sure, my dear Mr. Templar, that I can hardly be blamed for sincerely trusting that these gentlemen, or their agents, will succeed where I have failed.

Very truly yours,
RAYT MARIUS.

Teal read the letter through, and looked up with an incredulous half-puzled frown. Then, without speaking, he began to read it through again. Patricia stood up with a little sigh, straightened her dress and began to comb out her hair. Sergeant Barow shifted from one foot to the other, and compared his watch with the clock on the mantelpiece — it would be the fourth consecutive night that he had been late home for dinner, and his wife could scarcely be blamed for beginning to view his explanations with suspicion.

Mr. Teal was half-way through his second reading when the telephone rang. He hesitated for a moment, and then nodded to the girl.

"You can answer it," he said.

Patricia took up the instrument.

"There are two gentlemen here to see you, miss," said Sam Outrell. "Lord Iveldown and Mr. Farwill."

"Send them up," she said recklessly.

She had no idea why those two should have called to see her, but she was also beyond caring.

"Lord Iveldown and the Home Secretary are on their way," she

told Teal, as she put down the telephone. "You're holding quite a gathering here, aren't you?"

The detective blinked at her dubiously. He was unable to accept her statement at its face value, and he was unable for the moment to discover either an insulting witticism or the opening of another trap in it. He returned to his reading with only half his mind on it; and he had just finished when the buzz of the doorbell took her from the room.

He closed the book and changed his position so that he could see the hall.

". . . so unceremoniously, Miss Holm," Lord Iveldown was saying as he entered the room. "But the matter is urgent—most urgent." He stopped as he saw Teal. "And private," he added. "I did not know that you were entertaining."

"It must have been kept a secret," said the girl ironically.

She moved aside to shut the door; and as she did so Mr. Teal and the Honourable Leo Farwill saw each other at the same time. There was a moment's dead silence; and then Farwill coughed.

"Ah—Inspector," he said heavily. "I hope we are not—ah—disturbing you."

"No, sir," said Teal, looking at him curiously. He added: "I think you'll be glad to know, sir, that as far as I can see we've got all the evidence we need."

Farwill's hand went to his moustache. His face had gone puffy and grey, and there was a dry hoarseness in his voice.

"Ah—evidence," he repeated. "Ah—quite. Quite. Ah—evidence. That book——"

"Have you read it?" asked Iveldown raspingly.

"Only the first pace, my lord," said Teal. "The first page is a letter—it's rather involved, but I think that book will turn out to be the one we were looking for."

His heavy-lided china-blue eyes were fixed on the Home Secretary perplexedly and with a trace of subconscious hostility. There was a kind of gritty strain in the atmosphere which he could not understand; and, not understanding it, it bothered him. His second reading of the letter had definitely been distracted, and he had not yet clearly sorted its meaning out of the eloborate and unfamiliar phrases in which it was worded. He only knew that he held triumph in his hands, and that for some unaccountable reason the Honourable Leo Farwill, who had first put him on the trail, was not sharing his elation.

"Let me see the book," said Farwill.

"Ah—quite," he said shortwindedly. "Quite. Quite."

"Mr. Farwill was going to say," put in Lord Iveldown, "that we came here for a special purpose, hoping to intercept you, Inspector. Critical international developments——"

"Exactly," boomed Farwill throatily. "The matter is vital. I might almost say—ah—vital." He tucked the book firmly under his arm. "You will permit me to take complete charge of this affair, Inspector. I shall have to ask you to accompany Lord Iveldown and myself to Scotland Yard immediately, where I shall explain to the Chief Commissioner the reasons of State which obviously cannot be gone into here—— Ah—and your own asiduous efforts, even if misdirected, will be suitably recognised——"

The gentle click of a latch behind him made everyone spin round at once; and Patricia gave a little choking cry.

"Well, well, well!" breathed the smiling man who stood just inside the door. "That's great stuff, Leo—but how on earth do you manage to remember all those words without notes?"

It was the Saint.

He stood with his hands in his pockets and a freshly lighted cigarette tilting between his lips, with his hair blown awry by the sixty miles an hour he had averaged, and the sparkle of the wind in his eyes; and Hoppy Uniatz stood beside him. Ac-cording to their different knowledge, the others stared at him with various emotions registering on their dials; and the Saint smiled at them all impartially and came on in.

"Hullo, Pat," he murmured. "I didn't know you'd asked the Y.M.C.A. to move in. Why didn't you tell me?" His keen blue eyes, missing nothing, came to rest on the gaudily covered volume that Farwill was clutching under his arm. "So you've taken up literature at last, Leo," he said. "I always thought you would."

To say that Farwill and Iveldown were looking at him as if they had seen a ghost would be a trite understatement. They were goggling at him as if he had been the consolidated incarnation of all the spooks and banshees that ever howled through a maniac's nightmare. Their prosperous paunches were caving in like rubber balloons punctured with a sharp instrument; and it seemed as though all the inflation that escaped from their abdomens was going straight into their eyeballs. There was a sick blotchy pallor in their faces which suggested that they had been mentally spirited away on to the deck of a ship that was wallowing through

all the screaming furies of the Horn.

It was Farwill who first found his voice. It was not much of a voice—it was more like the croak of a strangling frog—but it produced words.

"Inspector," it said, "arrest that man."

Teal's somnolent eyes opened a little, and there was a gleam of tentative exhilaration in them. So, after all, it seemed as if he had been mistaken. He was not to be cheated of his triumph. His luck had turned.

"I was going to," he said, and started forward.

"On what charge?" asked the Saint.

"The same charge," said Teal inexorably. "Blackmail."

The Saint nodded.

"I see," he said, and shrugged his shoulders. "Oh, well—no game can go on for ever, and we've had lots of fun." His gaze watched the advancing detective with a hint of wicked banter in it that belied the rueful resignation of his features; but Teal did not see that at once. "It'll be a sensational case," said the Saint. "Let me give you an idea."

And without warning, with a flow of movements too swift to follow, he took a couple of paces sideways and aimed a punch at what was left of the Honourable Leo's prosperous corporation. Farwill instinctively jerked up his hands; and with a quick smile Simon turned the feint into a deft reach of his hand that caught *Her Wedding Secret* as it fell.

Barow and Teal plunged towards him simultaneously; and the Saint moved rapidly back—past the automatic that had appeared like magic in the hand of a Mr. Uniatz who this time had not been artifically obstructed on the draw.

"Stay back, youse guys!" barked Hoppy, in a voice quivering with exultation at his achievement; and involuntarily the two detectives checked.

The two politicians, equally involuntarily taking the lead in any popular movement, went further. They went back as far as the confines of the room would allow them.

"You know your duty, Inspector," said the Home Secretary tremblingly. "I order you to arrest those men."

"Don't order a good man to commit suicide," said the Saint curtly. "Nobody's going to get hurt—if you'll all behave yourselves for a few minutes. I'm the bloke who's being arrested, and I want to enjoy it. Readings by the Public Prosecutor of extracts from this book will be the high spot of the trial, and I want to have a rehearsal."

He turned the pages and quickly found a place.

"Now here's a juicy bit that'll whet your appetites," he remarked. "It must have something to do with those reasons of State which you were burbling about, Leo. *'On May 15th I dined again with Farwill, then Secretary of State for War. He was inclined to agree with me about the potentialities of the Aix-la-Chapelle incident for increasing the friction between France and Germany; and on my increasing my original offer to fifty thousand pounds he agreed to place before the Cabinet——'*"

"Stop!" shouted Farwill shrilly. "It's a lie!"

The Saint closed his book and put it down; and very slowly the smile returned to his lips.

"I shouldn't be so melodramatic as that," he said easily. "But of course it's a joke. I suppose it's really gone a bit too far."

There was another long silence; and then Lord Iveldown cleared his throat.

"Of course," he said in a cracked voice. "A joke."

"A joke," repeated Farwill hollowly. "Ah—of course."

Simon flicked his cigarette through the open window, and a rumble of traffic went by in the sudden quiet.

"And not, I'm afraid," he murmured, "in the best of taste."

His eyes strayed back to the staring gaze of Chief Inspector Teal.

Of all those persons present, Mr. Teal did not seem the most happy. It would be inaccurate to say that he realised exactly what was going on. He didn't. But something told him that there was a catch in it. Somewhere in the undercurrents of that scene, he knew, there was something phony — something that was preparing to gyp him of his triumph at the very moment of victory. He had only the dimmest idea of how it was being worked; but he had see it happen too many times before to mistake the symptoms.

"Leo will tell you," said the Saint.

Farwill licked his lips.

"I—ah—the joke was so—ah—silly that I—ah . . . Well, Inspector, when Mr. Templar approached us with the offer of this—ah—literary work, and—ah—knowing his, if I may say so, notorious—ah—character, I — ah — that is, we—thought that it would be humorous to play a slight—ah—practical joke on him, with your—ah—unwitting assistance. Ah——"

"Whereas, of course, you meant to buy it all the time," Simon prompted him gently.

"Ah—yes," said the Honour-

able Leo chokingly. "But it. Ah—of course.

"At once," said Lord Iveldown quaveringly, taking out his cheque-book.

"At-naturally," moaned the Honourable Leo, feeling for his pen. "At once."

"Two hundred thousand pounds, was it not, Mr. Templar?" said Lord Iveldown.

The Saint shook his head.

"The price has gone up a bit," he said. "It'll cost you two hundred and fifty thousand now—I need a new hat, and the Simon Templar Foundation isn't intended to pay for that."

With his head swimming and the blood drumming in his ears, Chief Inspector Claud Eustace Teal watched the cheques being made out and blotted and handed over. He would never really know how the trick was turned. He only knew that Simon Templar was back; and anything could happen. . . .

The parting words with which the Saint shepherded the gathering out of the door did nothing to enlighten him.

By the way, Leo," said the Saint, "you must remember to tell Neville to send on his share. If you toddle straight back home you'll find him waiting for you. He's standing guard over the Rose of Peckham, with a great big gun—and for some reason or other he thinks Snowdrop is me.

"Sir Humbolt Quipp came in and left a cheque," said Patricia Holm uncertainly.

Simon took it and added it to his collection. He fanned out the four precious scraps of paper and brought the Honourable Leo Farwill's contribution to the top. Then he removed this one from the others and gazed at it for a long time with a rather rueful frown.

"I'm afraid we let Leo off too lightly," he said. "When I begin to think what a splendiferous orgy of Teal-baiting we could have had with the Home Secretary permanently under our thumb, I almost wonder whether the Simon Templar Foundation is worth it."

But later on he brightened.

"It would have made life damned dull," he said.

the man who hated amelia jones

by Edgar Wallace

THERE WAS a letter that came to Leon Gonsalez, and the stamp bore the image and superscription of Alfonso XIII. It was from a placid man who had written his letter in the hour of siesta, when Cordova slept, and he had scribbled all the things which had come into his head as he sat in an orange bower overlooking the lordly Guadalquivir, now in yellow spate.

"It is from Poiccart," said Leon.

"Yes?" replied George Manfred, half asleep in a big armchair before the fire.

That and a green-shaded reading lamp supplied the illumination to their comfortable Jermyn Street flat at the moment.

"And what," said George, stretching himself, "what does our excellent friend Poiccart have to say?"

"A blight has come upon his onions," said Leon, solemnly, and Manfred chuckled and then was suddenly grave.

There was a time when the name of these three, with one who now lay in the Bordeaux cemetery, had stricken terror to

The Four Just Men were famous for many years as an extra-legal group of men, concerned by the law's delays and blindness, who were determined to spend their lives and their fortunes in righting the wrongs the Law, at that time, could not touch. Edgar Wallace was of course one of the great story tellers of all time.

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the hearts of evildoers. In those days The Four Just Men were a menace to the sleep of many cunning men who had evaded the law, yet had not evaded this ubiquitous organization, which slew ruthlessly in the name of Justice.

Poiccart was growing onions! Manfred sighed and repeated the words aloud.

"And why not?" demanded Leon. "Have you read of 'The Three Musketeers'?"

"Surely," said Manfred, with a smile at the fire.

"In what book, may I ask?" demanded Leon.

"Why, in 'The Three Musketeers,' of course," replied Manfred, in surprise.

"Then you did wrong," said Leon Gonsalez, promptly. "To love the Three Musketeers, you must read of them in 'The Iron Mask.' When one of them has grown fat and is devoting himself to his raiment and one is a mere courtier of the King of France and the other is old and full of sorrow for his love-sick child. Then they become human, my dear Manfred, just as Poiccart becomes human when he grows onions. Shall I read you bits?"

"Please," said Manfred, properly abashed.

"H'm" went on Gonsalez. "I told you about the onions, George. 'I have some gorgeous roses. Manfred would love them . . . do not take too much heed of this new blood test, by which the American doctor professes that he can detect degrees of relationship . . . the new little pigs are doing exceedingly well. There is one that is exceptionally intelligent and contemplative I have named him George'."

George Manfred by the fire squirmed in his chair and chuckled.

" 'This will be a very good year for wine, I am told,' " Leon read on, " 'but the oranges are not as plentiful as they were last year . . . do you know that the fingerprints of twins are identical? Curiously enough, the finger-prints of twins of the anthropoid ape are dissimilar. I wish you would get information on this subject——' "

He read on, little scraps of domestic news, fleeting excursions into scientific side issues, tiny scraps of gossip—they filled ten closely-written pages.

Leon folded the letter and put it in his pocket.

"Of course he's not right about the finger-prints of twins being identical. That was one of the illusions of the excellent Lombroso. Anyway, the finger-print system is unsatisfactory."

"I never heard it called into question," said George, in sur-

prise. "Why isn't it satisfactory?"

Leon rolled a cigarette with deft fingers, licked down the paper, and lit the ragged end before he replied.

"At Scotland Yard they have let us say, one hundred thousand finger-prints. In Britain there are fifty million inhabitants. One hundred thousand is exactly one five-hundredth of fifty millions. Suppose you were a police officer and you were called to the Albert Hall where five hundred people were assembled and told that one of these had in his possession stolen property and you received permission to search them. Would you be content with searching one and giving a clean bill to the rest?"

"Of course not," said Manfred, "but I see what you mean."

"I mean that until the whole of the country and every country in Europe adopts a system by which every citizen registers his finger-prints, and until all the countries have an opportunity of exchanging those finger-prints and comparing them with their own, it is ridiculous to say that no two prints are alike."

"That settles the finger-print system," said Manfred.

"Logically it does," said the complacent Leon, "but actually it will not, of course."

There was a long silence after this and then Manfred reached to a case by the side of the fireplace and took down a book.

Presently he heard the creak of a chair as Gonsalez rose and the soft "pad!" of a closing door. Manfred looked up at the clock and, as he knew, it was half-past eight.

In five minutes Leon was back again. He had changed his clothing and, as Manfred had once said before, his disguise was perfect. It was not a disguise in the accepted understanding of the world, for he had not in any way touched his face, or changed the colour of his hair. Only by his artistry he contrived to appear just as he wished to appear, an extremely poor man. His collar was clean, but frayed. His boots were beautifully polished, but they were old and patched. He did not permit the crudity of a heel worn down, but had fixed two circular rubber heels just a little too large for their foundations.

"You are an old clerk battling with poverty, and striving to the end to be genteel," said Manfred.

Gonsalez shook his head.

"I am a solicitor who, twenty years ago, was struck off the rolls and ruined because I helped a man to escape the processes of the law. An ever so much more

sympathetic *role*, George. Moreover, it brings people to me for advice. One of these nights you must come down to the public bar of the Cow and Compasses and hear me discourse upon the Married Woman's Property Act."

"I never asked you what you were before," said George. "Good hunting, Leon and my respectful salutations to Amelia Jones!"

Gonsalez was biting his lips thoughtfully and looking into the fire, and now he nodded.

"Poor Amelia Jones" he said, softly.

"You're a wonderful fellow," smiled Manfred; "only you could invest a charwoman of middle age with the glamour of romance."

Leon was helping himself into a threadbare overcoat.

"There was an English poet once—it was Pope, I think—who said that everybody was romantic who admired a fine thing, or did one. I rather think Amelia Jones has done both."

The Cow and Compasses is a small public-house in Treet Road, Deptford. The gloomy thoroughfare was wellnigh empty, for it was a grey cold night when Leon turned into the bar. The uninviting weather may have been responsible for the paucity of clients that evening, for there were scarcely half-a-dozen people on the sanded floor when he made his way to the bar and ordered a claret and soda.

One who had been watching for him started up from the deal form on which she had been sitting and subsided again when he walked toward her with glass in hand.

"Well, Mrs. Jones," he greeted her, "and how are you this evening?"

She was a stout woman with a white, worn face and hands that trembled spasmodically.

"I am glad you've come, sir," she said.

She held a little glass of port in her hand, but it was barely touched.

It was on one desperate night when in an agony of terror and fear this woman had fled from her lonely home to the light and comfort of the public-house that Leon had met her. He was at the time pursuing with the greatest caution a fascinating skull which he had seen on the broad shoulders of a Covent Garden porter. He had tracked the owner to his home and to his place of recreation and was beginning to work up to his objective, which was to secure the history and the measurements of this unimaginative bearer of fruit, when the stout charwoman had

drifted into his orbit. To-night she evidently had something on her mind of unusual importance, for she made three lame beginnings before she plunged into the matter which was agitating her.

"Mr. Lucas" (this was the name Gonsalez had given to the *habitues* of the Cow and Compasses), "I want to ask you a great favour. You've been very kind to me, giving me advice about my husband, and all that. But this is a big favour, and you're a very busy gentleman, too."

She looked at him appealingly, almost pleadingly.

"I have plenty of time just now," said Gonsalez.

"Would you come with me into the country to-morrow?" she asked. "I want you to—to—to see somebody."

"Why, surely, Mrs. Jones," said Gonsalez.

"Would you be at Paddington Station at nine o'clock in the morning? I would pay your fare," she went on, fervently. "Of course I shouldn't allow you to go to any expense—I've got a bit of money put by."

"As to that," said Leon, "I've made a little money myself to-day, so don't trouble about the fare. Have you heard from your husband?"

"Not from him," she shook her hear, "but from another man who has just come out of prison."

Her lips trembled and tears were in her eyes.

"He'll do it, I know he'll do it," she said, with a catch in her voice, "but it's not me that I'm thinking of."

Leon opened his eyes.

"Not you?" he repeated.

He had suspected the third factor, yet had never been able to fit it in the scheme of this commonplace woman.

"No, sir, not me," she said, miserably. "You know he hates me and you know he's going to do me in the moment he gets out, but I haven't told you why."

"Where is he now?" asked Leon.

"Devizes Jail; he's gone there for his discharge. He'll be out in two months."

"And then he'll come straight to you, you think?"

She shook her head.

"Not he," she said, bitterly. "That ain't his way. You don't know him, Mr. Lucas. But nobody does know him like I do. If he'd come straight to me, it'd be all right, but he's not that kind. He's going to kill me, I tell you, and I don't care how soon it comes. He wasn't called Bash Jones for nothing. I'll get it all right!" she nodded, grimly. "He'll just walk into the room

and bash me without a word, and that'll be the end of Amelia Jones. But I don't mind, I don't mind," she repeated. "It's the other that's breaking my heart and has been all the time."

He knew it was useless to try to persuade her to tell her troubles, and at closing time they left the bar together.

"I'd ask you home only that might make it worse, and I don't want to get you into any kind of bother, Mr. Lucas," she said.

He offered his hand. It was the first time he had done so, and she took it in her big limp palm and shook it feebly.

"Very few people have shaken hands with Amelia Jones," thought Gonsalez, and he went back to the flat in Jermyn Street to find Manfred asleep before the fire.

He was waiting at Paddington Station the next morning in a suit a little less shabby and, to his surprise, Mrs. Jones appeared dressed in better taste than he could have imagined was possible. Her clothes were plain, but they effectively disguised the class to which she belonged. She took tickets for Swindon and there was little conversation on the journey. Obviously she did not intend to unburden her mind as yet.

The train was held up at Newbury whilst a slow up-train shunted to allow a school special to pass. It was crowded with boys and girls who waved a cheery and promiscuous greeting as they passed.

"Of course!" nodded Leon; "it is the beginning of the Easter holidays. I had forgotten."

At Swindon they alighted, and then for the first time the woman gave some indication as to the object of their journey.

"We've got to stay on this platform," she said, nervously. "I'm expecting to see somebody, and I'd like you to see her, too, Mr. Lucas."

Presently another special ran into the station, and the majority of the passengers in this train were children. Several alighted at the junction, apparently to change for some other destination than London, and Leon was talking to the woman, who he knew was not listening, when he saw her face light up. She left him with a little gasp and walked quickly along the platform to greet a tall, pretty girl, wearing the crimson and white hat-ribbon of a famous West of England school.

"Why, Mrs. Jones, it is so kind of your to come down to see me. I wish you wouldn't take so much trouble. I should be only too happy to come to London,"

she laughed. "Is this a friend of yours?"

She shook hands with Leon, her eyes smiling her friendliness.

"It's all right, Miss Grace," said Mrs. Jones, agitated. "I just thought I'd pop down and have a look at you. How are you getting on at school, miss?"

"Oh, splendidly!" said the girl. "I've won a scholarship."

"Isn't that lovely" said Mrs. Jones in an awe-stricken voice. "You always was wonderful, my dear."

The girl turned to Leon.

"Mrs. Jones was my nurse, you know, years and years ago, weren't you, Mrs. Jones?"

Amelia Jones nodded.

"How is your husband? Is he still unpleasant?"

"Oh, he ain't so bad, miss," said Mrs. Jones, bravely. "He's a little trying at times."

"Do you know, I should like to meet him."

"Oh, no, you wouldn't, miss," gasped Amelia. "That's only your kind heart. Where are you spending your holidays, miss?" she asked.

"With some friends of mine at Clifton — Molly Walker, Sir George Walker's daughter."

The eyes of Amelia Jones devoured the girl, and Leon knew that all the love in her barren life was lavished upon this child she had nursed. They walked up and down the platform together, and when her train came in, Mrs. Jones stood at the carriage door until it drew out from the station, and then waited motionless, looking after the express until it melted in the distance.

"I'll never see her again!" she muttered, brokenly. "I'll never see her again Oh, my God!"

Her face was drawn and ghastly in its pallor, and Leon took her arm.

"You must come and have some refreshment, Mrs. Jones. You are very fond of that young lady?"

"Fond of her?" She turned upon him. "Fond of her? She—she is my daughter!"

They had a carriage to themselves going back to town and Mrs. Jones told her story.

"Grace was three years old when her father got into trouble," she said. "He had always been a brute and I think he'd been under the eyes of the police since he was a bit of a kid. I didn't know this when I married him. I was nursemaid in a house that he'd burgled, and I was discharged because I'd left the kitchen door ajar for him, not knowing that he was a thief. He did one long lagging, and when he came out he swore he wouldn't go back to prison again, and the next time,

if there was any danger of an alarm being raised, he would make it a case of murder. He and another man got into touch with a rich bookmaker on Blackheath. Bash used to do his dirty work for him, but they quarrelled, and Bash and his pal burgled the house and got away with nearly nine thousand pounds.

"It was a big race day and Bash knew there'd be a lot of money in notes that had been taken on the race-course and that couldn't be traced. I thought he'd killed this man at first. It wasn't his fault that he hadn't. He walked into the room and bashed him as he lay in bed—that was Bash's way—that how he got his name. He thought there'd be a lot of inquiries and gave me the money to look after. I had to put the notes into an old beer-jar half-full of sand, ram in the cork, and cover the cork and the neck with candle-fat so that the water couldn't get through, and then put it in the cistern, which he could reach from one of the upstairs rooms at the back of the house. I was nearly mad with fear because I thought the gentleman had been killed, but I did as I was told and sank the jar in the cistern. That night Bash and his mate were getting away to the north of England when they were arrested at Euston Station. Bash's friend was killed, for he ran across the line in front of an engine, but they caught Bash and the house was searched from end to end. He got fifteen years' penal servitude, and he would have been out two years ago if he hadn't been a bad character in prison.

"When he was in jail I had to sit down and think, Mr. Lucas, and my first thought was of my child. I saw the kind of life that she was going to grow up to, the surroundings, the horrible slums, the fear of the police, for I knew that Bash would spend a million, if he had it, in a few weeks. I knew I was free of Bash for at least twelve years, and I thought and I thought and at last I made up my mind.

"It was twelve months after he was in jail that I dared get the money, for the police were still keeping their eye on me as the money had not been found. I won't tell you how I bought grand clothes so that nobody would suspect I was a working woman or how I changed the money.

"I put it all into shares. I'm not well educated, but I read the newspapers for months, the columns about money. At first I was puzzled and I could make no end to it, but after a while I got to understand, and it was in an Argentine company that

I invested the money, and I got a lawyer in Bermondsey to make a trust of it. She gets the interest every quarter and pays her own bills—I've never touched a penny of it. The next thing was to get my little girl out of the neighbourhood, and I sent her away to a home for small children—it broke my heart to part with her—until she was old enough to go into a school. I used to see her regularly, and when, after my first visit, I found she had almost forgotten who I was, I pretended that I'd been her nurse—and that's the story."

Gonsalez was silent.

"Does your husband know?"

"He knows I spent the money," said the woman, staring blankly out of the window. "He knows that the girl is at a good school. He'll find out!"—she spoke almost in a whisper. "He'll find out!"

So that was the tragedy! Leon was struck dumb by the beauty of this woman's sacrifice. When he found his voice again, he asked:—

"Why do you think he will kill you? These kind of people threaten."

"Bash doesn't threaten as a rule," she interrupted him. "It's the questions he's been asking people who know me. People from Deptford who he's met in prison. Asking what I do at nights, what time I go to bed, what I do in the daytime. That's Bash's way."

"I see," said Leon. "Has anybody given him the necessary particulars?" he asked.

She shook her head.

"They've done their best for me," she said. "They are bad characters and they commit crimes, but there's some good hearts amongst them. They have told him nothing."

"Are you sure?"

"I'm certain. If they had he wouldn't be still asking. Why, Toby Brown came up from Devizes a month ago and told me Bash was there and was still asking questions about me. He'd told Toby that he'd never do another lagging, and that he reckoned he'd be alive up to Midsummer Day if they caught him."

Leon went up to his flat that night exalted.

"What have you been doing with yourself?" asked Manfred. "I, for my part, have been lunching with the excellent Mr. Fare."

"And I have been moving in a golden haze of glory Not my own, no, not my own, Manfred," he shook his head, "but the glory of Amelia Jones. A wonderful woman, George. For her sake I am going to take a month's holi-

day, during which time you can go back to Spain and see our beloved Poiccart and hear all about the onions."

"I would like to go back to Madrid for a few days," said Manfred, thoughtfully. "I find London particularly attractive, but if you really are going to take a holiday—where are you spending it, by the way?"

"In Devizes Jail," replied Gonsalez, cheerfully, and Manfred had such faith in his friend that he offered no comment.

Leon Gonsalez left for Devizes the next afternoon. He arrived in the town at dusk and staggered unsteadily up the rise toward the market-place. At ten o'clock that night a police-constable found him leaning against a wall at the back of the Bear Hotel, singing foolish songs, and ordered him to move away. Whereupon Leon addressed him in language for which he was at the time (since he was perfectly sober) heartily ashamed. Therefor did he appear before a bench of magistrates the next morning, charged with being drunk, using abusive language, and obstructing the police in the execution of their duty.

"This is hardly a case which can be met by imposing a fine," said the staid chairman of the Bench. "Here is a stranger from London who comes into this town and behaves in a most disgusting manner. Is anything known against the man?"

"Nothing, sir," said the jailer regretfully.

"You wil pay a fine of twenty shillings or go to prison for twenty-one days."

"I would much rather go to prison than pay," said Leon, truthfully.

So they committed him to the local jail, as he had expected. Twenty-one days later, looking very brown and fit, he burst into the flat and Manfred turned with outstretched hands.

"I heard you were back," said Leon, joyously. "I've had a great time! They rather upset my calculations by giving me three weeks instead of a month. and I was afraid that I'd get back before you."

"I came back yesterday," said George, and his eyes strayed to the sideboard.

Six large Spanish onions stood in a row, and Leon Gonsalez doubled up with mirth. It was not until he had changed into more presentable garments that he told of his experience.

"Bash Jones had undoubtedly homicidal plans," he said. "The most extraordinary case of facial anamorphosis I have seen. I worked with him in the tailor's

shop. He is coming out next Monday."

"He welcomed you, I presume, when he discovered you were from Deptford?" said Manfred dryly.

Leon nodded.

"He intends to kill his wife on the third of the month, which is the day after he is released," he said.

"Why so precise?" asked Manfred, in surprise.

"Because that is the only night she sleeps in the house alone. There are usually two young men lodgers who are railway men and these do duty until three in the morning on the third of every month."

"Is this the truth or are you makig it up?" asked Manfred.

"I did make it up," admitted Gonsalez. "But this is the story I told and he swallowed it eagerly. The young men have no key, so they come in by the kitchen door, which is left unlocked. The kitchen door is reached by a narrow passage which runs the length of Little Mill Street and parallel with the houses. Oh, yes, he was frightfully anxious to secure information, and he told me that he would never come back to jail again except for a short visit. An interesting fellow. I think he had better die," said Leon, with some gravity. "Think of the possibilities for misery, George. This unfortunate girl, happy in her friends, well-bred ——"

"Would you say that," smiled Manfred, "with Bash for a father?"

"Well-bred, I repeat," said Gonsalez, firmly. "Breeding is merely a q u a l i t y acquired through lifelong association with gentlefolks. Put the son of a duke in the slums and he'll grow up a peculiar kind of slum child, but a slum child, nevertheless. Think of the horror of it. Dragging this child back to the kennels of Deptford, for that will be the meaning of it, supposing this Mr. Bash Jones does not kill his wife. If he kills her then the grisly truth is out. No, I think we had better settle this Mr. Bash Jones."

"I agree," said Manfred, puffing thoughtfully at his cigar, and Leon Gonsalez sat down at the table with Browning's poems open before him and read, pausing now and again to look thoughtfully into space as he elaborated the method by which Bash Jones should die.

On the afternoon of the third, Mrs. Amelia Jones was called away by telegram. She met Leon Gonsalez at Paddington Station.

"You have brought your key with you, Mrs. Jones?"

"Yes, sir," said the woman in surprise. Then: "Do you know that my husband is out of prison?"

"I know, I know," said Gonsalez, "and because he is free I want you to go away for a couple of nights. I have some friends in Plymouth. They will probably meet you at the station, and if they do not meet you, you must go to this address."

He gave her an address of a boarding-house that he had secured from a Plymouth newspaper.

"Here is some money. I insist upon your taking it. My friends are very anxious to help you."

She was in tears when he left her.

"You are sure you have locked up your house?" said Leon at parting.

"I've got the key here, sir."

She opened her bag and he noticed that now her hands trembled all the time.

"Let me see," said Leon, taking the bag in his hand and peering at the interior in his short-sighted way. "Yes, there it is."

He put in his hand, brought it out apparently empty, and closed the bag again.

"Good-bye, Mrs. Jones," he said, "and don't lose courage."

When dark fell Leon Gonsalez arrived in Little Mill Street carrying a bulky something in a black cloth bag. He entered the house unobserved, for the night was wet and gusty and Little Mill Street crouched over its scanty fires.

He closed the door behind him and with the aid of his pocket-lamp found his way to the one poor bedroom in the tiny house. He turned down the covers, humming to himself, then very carefully he removed the contents of the bag, the most important of which was a large glass globe.

Over this he carefully arranged a black wig and searched the room for articles of clothing which might be rolled into a bundle. When he had finished his work, he stepped back and regarded it with admiration. Then he went downstairs, unlocked the kitchen door, and to make absolutely certain crossed the little yard and examined the fastening of the gate which led from the lane. The lock apparently was permanently out of order and he went back satisfied.

In one corner of the room was a clothes-hanger, screened from view by the length of cheap cretonne. He had cleared this corner of its clothing to make up the bundle in the bed. Then he sat down in a chair and waited with the patience which is the

peculiar attribute of the scientist.

The church bells had struck two when he heard the backgate creak, and rising noiselessly took something from his pocket and stepped behind the cretonne curtain. It was not a house in which one could move without sound, for the floorboards were old and creaky and every stair produced a crack. But the man who was creeping from step to step was an artist, and Leon heard no other sound until the door slowly opened and a figure came in.

It moved with stealthy steps across the room and stood for a few seconds by the side of the bulky figure in the bed. Apparently he listened and was satiffied. Then Leon saw a stick raised and fall.

Bash Jones did not say a word until he heard the crash of the broken glass. Then he uttered an oath and Leon heard him fumble in his pocket for his matches. The d e l a y was fatal . The chlorine gas, compressed at a pressure of many atmospheres, surged up around him. He choked, turned to run, and fell, and the yellow gas rolled over him in a thick and turgid cloud.

Leon Gonsalez stepped from his place of concealment and the dying man, staring up, saw two enormous glass eyes and the snout-like nozzle of the respirator and went bewildered to his death.

Leon collected the broken glass and carefully wrapped the pieces in his bag. He replaced the clothes with the most extraordinary care and put away the wig and tidied the room before he opened the window and the door. Then he went to the front of the house and opened those windows, too. A south-wester was blowing, and by the morning the house would be free from gas.

Not until he was in the backyard did he remove the gasmask he wore and place that, too, in the bag.

An hour later he was in his own bed in a deep, untroubled sleep.

Mrs. Jones slept well that night, and in a dainty cubicle somewhere in the West of England a slim, girlish figure in pyjamas snuggled into her pilow and sighed happily.

But Bash Jones slept soundest of all.

the living end

by Robert Bloch

When Herbert Zane received the Nobel Prize in Science, his accepteance speech was simple.

"All that I am," said Herbert, "I owe to my wife."

Which was quite true, because Herbert hated his wife.

Fifteen years ago, at the time of their wedding, he had been very much in love with Hilda. During the early months of marriage he had spent all of his nights and a good part of his days in demonstrating his affection – but somehow those demonstrations had never quite come off. His most painstaking and elaborate experiments in amour always failed completely. All of Herbert's profound knowledge of anatomy and physiology did not come to his aid; while he could evoke miracles of response from a guinea-pig in the laboratory, he got no reaction from Hilda in the boudoir.

Finally Herbert faced up to the facts, as scientists must do; his most devoted research in the field of physical passion had brought him, quite literally, to

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When you mention Robert Bloch, people think of PSYCHO and of his later novels, likewise studies of psychotic minds, and remember the apocryphal publicity story that he has the heart of a child – "he (chuckle, chuckle) keeps it on his desk." The real Bloch (see his article in the December Rogue) is a man of convictions (rare enough these days), a writer long active in s-f and this field.

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a dead end. Turning his back on Hilda, he dedicated himself entirely to the pursuit of his profession.

Hilda didn't object to him turning his back to her—at least, not within the confines of their double-bed—but she became increasingly impatient with his open neglect by day.

As a result she began to nag him, and because of *that,* Herbert's indifference was transformed into actual hatred.

Some men answer nagging wives with a sharp rejoinder; Herbert was more interested in scientific retorts. Other husbands might take refuge in the bottle; Herbert preferred the test-tube. So it really was because of his hatred that he spent so much time in the laboratory and became such an eminent scientist.

By the time he won the Nobel Prize, the two of them scarcely exchanged a word; she didn't ask what he planned to do with the money and he didn't tell her. It wasn't until all the new and complicated apparatus was moved into the basement that she opened her mouth in a question.

"What's all this stuff for?" she asked.

"Gravity."

"You're going to experiment on gravity? Is that what you need these fancy machines for? Why couldn't you be sensible and buy a dishwasher and a new vacuum-cleaner—"

Herbert shook his head impatiently. "Gravity just a part of the problem," he muttered. "Sterols, too."

Then he went downstairs and stayed there. He spent four months and forty thousand dollars. He started with a hypothesis, evolved a theory, developed working experiments, and came up with an ultimate achievement.

It was a very ultimate achievement indeed — for Herbert Zane perfected nothing less than an elixir of immortality.

And when he came up with it (in a small, one-ounce bottle) he still had nothing to say. There was no sense even trying to explain anything to Hilda. He couldn't tell her that during the long years in the laboratory he cursed the idea that he was wasting his life tied to a stupid shrew. He couldn't tell her he drowned his curses in dreams of the day he might finally be free of her and then—as is the way with scientists — attempted to translate his dreams into reality. He'd experimented endlessly, with fruit-flies and frogs, and white rats. Now, finally, he'd succeeded. And there was nothing to do but exercise his scientific patience and wait.

Herbert knew he could never give his gift to the world; mankind as a whole wasn't ready for immortality. If the news ever leaked out, there'd be bloodshed. Granting perpetual life to a favored or wealthy few would mean war and revolution, and extending it to everyone would bring overpopulation and perpetual famine.

So he decided to drink the elixir and then just sit back and sweat it out until Hilda died of old age. After all, there'd be plenty of time to enjoy himself in the future – he had all eternity ahead of him.

And some day, perhaps, he *could* reveal his great achievement. Herbert had visions of himself sitting before a cabana at Antibes, gazing into the frank, open eyes and cleavage of a voluptuous and understanding blonde—someone like Brigitte Bardot's grand-daughter, perhaps.

Softly and tenderly he'd murmur of how he'd investigated physiological deterioration which he felt was linked with the pull of gravity upon the internal organs and cellular structure of the body. He'd whisper his belief that once they lost the proper tonus, it was possible for various sterol compounds to form, which in turn led to the degenerative processes of senescence. Gently he'd impart the thrilling news that if a biochemical means could be found to counteract these processes, the regenerative function of the individual cells would remain unimpaired and the result would be perpetual life. Then, as he lifted her to her feet and led her into the cabana, he would reveal the greatest news of all—he had found the biochemical solution.

And as she stared up at him, eyes and cleavage widening, she would gasp, "But *cherie,* is it that you make to tell me you will live forever? *How old are you?*"

"One hundred and five," Herbert would boom triumphantly, as he hurled himself upon her—

Oh, it was a great dream, and an even greater reality. Because it *was* reality, it need never end. If he liked, he might confer immortality upon Brigitte Bardot's grand-daughter, or Kim Novak's great-great-step-niece, if they particularly pleased him and he preferred to do so. But perhaps not; no sense in building up a perpetual harem when he had free choice of all the billions of women yet unborn. It might be that even the most beautiful and passionate females would grow tiresome in time. Right now he was sure of only one thing; he was already tired to death of unbeautiful, unpassionate Hilda.

Not really "tired to death", of course, because once he drank his elixir he would never die.

So Herbert Zane emerged from his laboratory, an ounce of immortality in his hand, and settled down to wait. He planned to drink off the potion that very night, but first——

First there was his duty as a trained and dedicated scientist. Even if he had no intention of ever revealing his discovery to the world at large, he must still set down his findings in accurate, orderly form. There were all his notes and observations of experiments to transcribe, starting from the day he first conferred immortality on two fruit flies (whom, in a burst of unscientific sentimentality, he immediately had christened "Adam" and "Eve').

Going into his study, Herbert placed the precious bottle of elixir at his left elbow, stacked his notes on the desk at the right of the typewriter, and went to work. It was a tedious proces, and Herbert was already at the point of physical and nervous exhaustion. Somewhere a-'long the line, he fell asleep.

And somewhere along the line, while he slept, Hilda must have tiptoed in to stare at him, peer over his shoulder, and then read what he had written.

Because Herbert was awakened by her whoop of joy.

"Oh, darling!" she wheezed, all three of her chins quivering with the intensity of her delight. "I couldn't resist peeking, and now I understand! You went and did it, didn't you, without even breathing an itsy-bitsy word to me, and here all along I thought you were just being mean! But it was a secret, wasn't it, and you wanted to surprise me!"

"Huh?" Herbert inquired.

"I'm talking about *this!*" And Hilda lifted the tiny one-ounce bottle containing the elixir of immortality. "You made it just for *us*, didn't you—just for we two, so we can always be together. Oooh, isn't he the sweetums boy——"

"Hey, what do you think you're doing?" Herbert gasped.

Hilda uncorked the bottle and lifted it to her lips. "I'm taking my half, of course, silly," she informed him. "Ladies first! Well, here's looking at you——"

But she wasn't looking at him, and that was her mistake. With a snarl of mingled rage and apprehension, Herbert sprang at her and wrenched the bottle from her fingers. As the precious liquid began to spatter, he thrust the bottle between his teeth and drained it dry at a single gulp. A fiery essence coursed through his veins, flowed through his fingers as they closed about

Hilda's fat neck. Everything turned red before him—including her astonished face. Then she stuck her tongue out at him. By the time he realized what this meant and relaxed his grip, her face wasn't red any more. It was quite purple. And Hilda herself was quite dead.

Herbert didn't panic.

Quickly, he considered the situation. Hilda was dead, and nothing could change that now. The best thing to do was to get rid of all the evidence. First he broke the bottle, then he burned all his notes and papers. Then he got ready to drag Hilda's body down into the basement and stuff it into the furnace. It was a gruesome project, but he had no choice. Besides, he was immortal now—and the stakes were worth it. He was fighting for eternity. The sight of Hilda's flabby corpse unnerved him, but he'd be able to forget about it in time. And there would always be plenty of time——

That's what he was thinking as he started to drag it down the cellar steps. That's what he was thinking as the doorbell rang and the neighbor lady stepped into the kitchen, unannounced, to ask Hilda for a cup of flour.

She didn't get her flour, but she did get a glimpse of Hilda on the steps — and ran out, screaming.

Herbert ran out, too, but he didn't scream. Not even when the squadcar caught up with him, three blocks down the street. Not even when he was questioned, booked, indicated, and tried for murder. Immortals are proud people.

Herbert Zane didn't scream at all. Not until the very moment, after the verdict was brought in, when the judge said, "I sentence you to imprisonment for life—"

NEXT MONTH –

THE SAINT HAD THREE INTERESTS — PRETTY GIRLS, PLUNDER, AND A CHALLENGING MYSTERY. VALERIE NORTH WAS PRETTY, HER BROTHER'S DEATH WAS A MYSTERY, AND THERE WAS BOTH MONEY AND A MURDERER WAITING IN THE AFFAIR OF

THE COVETOUS HEADSMAN

A SAINT STORY by LESLIE CHARTERIS

in the June 1963 issue of THE SAINT MYSTERY MAGAZINE

story to be whispered

by Cornell Woolrich

I WAS twenty-one, and the time was Twenty-nine, and the town was San Francisco.

The San Francisco of our dreams, all those of us who lived back inland, on the farms and in the valleys and on the upslopes leading toward the mountains. The San Francisco where the money was, the San Francisco where success was, the San Francisco where beautiful women were. Many of whom you'd love when you went there (or so you dreamed). One of whom you'l finally marry there and settle down with there.

I didn't have much: you don't have much at twenty-one. Then again, you had everything. I had a hotelroom that had cost me the standard two-dollars-and-a-half just off the upper end of Market Street, nine till three the next day. I had a valise in that hotelroom—originally my father's, from his own young footloose days, but he had turned it over to me for my first trip away from home. In the hotel-safe for safekeeping ("The management is not responsible," etc.) I had,

In theory — some of us might not react the way this young man does, faced by this situation. But is this so certain? Cornell Woolrich, one of the all-time greats in this field, and author of THE BRIDE WORE BLACK, THE PHANTOM LADY, etc., raises this disturbing question in the present story, set in San Francisco a generation ago. *H.S.S.*

I think, forty or fifty dollars.

But I had a job, a good one too, starting Monday morning at nine.

And this was Saturday night.

I'd come in two days ahead, just to make sure no one would get the job away from me by default. Trains could be delayed, anything could happen.

I'd had a meal, and I stood now in front of an Owl Drugstore some distance down Market from where I'd started out, looking at each girl going by. Each one who had no man with her. I was not truthfully what the period referred to as a Drugstore Cowboy, but there wasn't any other way for me than this to meet a girl. The town was new to me. Back home I had a small notebook with various names in it, but here I didn't know a soul.

Looking back now, it seems strange to think of the way the women dressed at that time. I don't think at any time, before or since, was the dress of women more of a universal uniform, with less variation in it. They were all straight up-and-down-hanging things, completely shapeless, with no waists to them. They were like shifts or long undershirts down to the knees. The only variation that could possibly enter into them was that of color, and to a lesser degree, texture or fabric. And I don't think, either, that at any time before or since, has the natural configuration of women, their body-contours, been more toned down, more effaced. The ideal of the period was quite frankly the tomboyish figure or form, and to achieve this the bosom was ruthlesly flattened to invisibility, the waist was obliterated, and the curve of the hips was planed down. Their figures were like pipe-stem cleaners. Even in the wearing of the hair the sex-differences were kept at minimum, for not only was it worn cropped short by almost all women of every age, but many of the younger ones eved had it shingled and razored on the back of the neck the way men did.

Of all the feminine attributes, only the smallness of the hands, the feet, and the facial features had not been tampered with in one way or another. Simply because they could not be, I suppose.

I stood there watching them all go by, and I wouldn't have been twenty-one, and on my own in a brand-new town, if I hadn't hoped for a signal from one of them that my company, my presence at her side, would be accepted. Once or twice I even made a false start, thinking I had seen such an indication, but

because no additional encouragement was forthcoming, I lost my nerve and fell back again. I was not an expert Casanova or Don Juan or whatever the word for it is. Back in the small town I'd come from, each boy knew almost all the girls of a like age, and a procedure such as this was uncalled-for.

So the crowd passed back and forth, the halcyon street-crowd of a halcyon period, both alike carefree, untroubled by any cosmic fears of destruction, untroubled even by economic doubts and worries. Fun, a good time, was the only criterion.

The Golden Twenties, almost over, just about to end, but nobody knew that yet. They seemed intended to stay on forever. Oh, everyone knew the date on the calendar would change in just a few short months more, but no one thought the spirit of the times ever would.

Finally, just when I was about ready to give up and move on elsewhere, or else resign myself to spending the evening alone, my perseverance paid off. I looked into the eyes of someone going by, and she not only returned the look, she held it steadily, for as long as were were opposite one another.

There could be no mistaking it this time. She stood there poised at the brink of the sidewalk longer than was necessary in order to obtain a favorable chance to cross over safely. Several breaks in the cross-street traffic offered themselves, and she didn't take advantage of them.

Finally she glanced very charily over her own shoulder, not all the way around, but just enough to show me her profile, and smiled very slightly in interrogation. The smile plainly was meant to say, "Aren't you going to come over and speak to me? That's what I'm waiting here for."

Someone more experienced than I at this sort of thing might have detected a touch of furtiveness about her bearing that detracted from it by that much, but I was too new at it to go in for nuances. Besides, in what other way could she have gone about it? She couldn't be too obvious about it without the risk of attracting humiliating attention on the public sidewalk.

I stepped forward away from the glass drugstore showcase—I had been leaning out from it interrogatively—and went after her, reached her, and stopped alongside her.

We both smiled at each other, openly now, she as well as I.

"How are you?" I said, informally if not very originally.

"I'm all right," she said. "How're you?" Friendly, if also

not very originally.

After this opening gambit, the conversation picked up pace, even though it remained staccato for some time to come yet, due, I suppose, to our not knowing one another well as yet.

"Going anyplace?" I asked.

"Just out walking," she said.

"All right if I come along with you?" I asked.

"If you want to," she said demurely.

"I do want to," I said. "I like your looks."

"Thanks," she smiled appreciatively. "I like yours too," she said.

That ended the preliminary stage. We now knew each other, technically speaking. We were now indissolubly together for the space of the evening, and, as in the larger area covered by a marriage-ceremony no one dare separate us or try to come between us. At least not without answering to me. She was now my girl, at least for the time being, and I was her date. Youth doesn't go in for lond-winded introductory build-ups.

"Want to go to a show?" I asked, as we finally breached the crossing that had held her back for so long.

"I don't think so," she said without enthusiasm. "I saw one last night."

"Do you want to have something to eat?" was my next proposal of entertainment.

"I had something just a little while before you came along," she said to that.

I had nearly run out of suggestions by now. "Well, do you want to have a drink, then?"

This, for the first time, was met willingly. "Sure, if you want to yourself," was the way she put it.

"The only trouble is," I had to admit, "I'm new here. I don't know where any of the speaks are."

"I don't know where the *speaks* are myself," she said, making a distinction. "But I do know a place we could go."

"Where?" I asked.

"Know what a gin-flat is?" she asked me in turn.

I thought I'd heard the expression before, but I wasn't sure of the exact meaning.

"A friend of mine uses the place she lives, her own flat, to sell drinks in," she explained. "She won't admit strangers, that way she stays out of trouble, but if you know her you can get in."

I wondered if it would cost very much. I didn't say it aloud, but she seemed to read my mind.

"You don't have to worry," she said tactfully. "If you run out, I can always get credit there. We've known each other a long time."

That sufficed, and we started out without further ado.

I no longer recall which streets we took to get there. All of San Fran was still so new to me that their names wouldn't have meant anything anyway. I do remember that the flat—or apartment-building was situated at the intersection of two streets that came together at an angle instead of squarely. In other words the house was wedge-shaped. One of the two streets ran down the slope of a hill at a breakneck incline; the other was on the level.

We went in, rode up I think three floors in an automatic elevator, got out, and she pushed a doorbell. You could hear music and a welter of voices coming from the other side even before it opened. But toned down below the point of creating a disturbance.

It opened and a harridan of about fifty-five stood looking at us. There wasn't a single personable quality about her to my twenty-one-year-old eyes. Her hair was as coarse as rope, and bleached to the same dirty color. She looked tough, she walked tough, and she talked tough. Even when she stood still, as she was doing now, she was tough standing still. She stood with one hip-joint thrown out of whack, and a hand planted on top of it.

"You," she said to the girl who'd brought me. She flipped her head curtly. "Mon in," she said. Then she added to her, "Where 'j get the young one?"

The girl ignored that. She whispered to me, "Slip her a couple bucks. It costs a buck a head admission. Then after that you pay for the drinks as you get them."

"You know the way," the proprietess or whatever you'd call her said, and she turned aside into an open doorway and left the two of us on our own. She evidently didn't mix with the paying customers. I caught a glimpse of a tall white refrigerator and a tabletop studded with empty carbonated-water bottles in there where she'd gone.

She'd taken the living-room of her flat—or rather had had a carpenter do it for her — and knocked up a row of wooden partitions along one wall. Each little enclosure they formed held benches and a clamped-down table. They were all taken except one, down at the very end, and we slipped into that one. Next to us there was a party of four, two sailors and their girls, very noisy but good-natured about it. Then there was a girl wearing an orange dress with black polka dots, further down the line somewhere. I can still remember her;

you could see that dress a mile away.

And that was about all there was to the place. A haggard waiter with one of these ineradicable subcataneous b l u e beards and blue eye-pouches to match. A record-machine to play music, a cigarette machine so you could smoke, and the floor left bare so you could dance. Two baby-spots trained down on it from opposite corners, one swathed in red tissue paper, the other in blue, so you could have atmosphere.

I thought it was the cat's pajamas, as they said at the time. I thought it was the bee's knees. I thought this was living it up. At twenty-one you're easily pleased.

So the evening began. The evening I never forgot all the rest of my life.

They played the songs that were hits that season—*Moanin' Low* and *Mean To Me* and *Tiptoe Through the Tulips,* which Nick Lucas had introduced in one of the big musical movies that were just beginning to come out. Once we got up and danced, but I had never been a good dancer, and to my surprise I found out that she wasn't either. I had always thought it was second nature to most girls. She was sort of rigid, hard to push around. After that we just sat there and let the gin do its work.

The gin was murderous; juniper flavoring added to raw alcohol. You couldn't tell which was worse, the flavoring or the base. But you couldn't get it any better than that all over America at the time. If you wanted a good drink, you had to cross the border to Mexicali or Montreal.

Even so, the frump that ran the dump must have coined money; there was no overhead to speak of. Just the rank rotgut, a couple of cases of mixer a night, and the tubercular waiter, who looked like he was related to her (probably an illegitimate son) and therefore not on salary. Maybe a monthly fix to the janitor to keep quiet about it.

As I got drunker, every time I glimpsed the girl in the polka-dotted dress I got the weirdest optical illusion I'd ever had in my life. All the polka-dots seemed to swarm upward off the dress and hand there suspended over her, like a cloud of lazy bees hovering in mid-air. She'd move offside, in a plain orange-color dress. Then the dots would all go after her and land back all over again. She was always just one step too quick for them to go along with her, and they always had to catch up afterwards.

After a while the sailors and their girls were no longer there, without my noticing at just which point they had left. Just a forlorn and forgotten White Rock bottle stayed on there to mark their place. Then the girl in the polka-dots was gone with her swain too, and that I didn't mind. Then we were all alone in the place, and it was time for us to go too.

On our way to the door, the roughneck manageress accosted us.

"You didn't give me my usual discount," the girl with me told her.

"Listen, baby," she wheezed, "I'm not in business for my health."

"Well, I could have steered him somewhere else," my girl pointed out.

"You wouldn't have dared," the other one jeered. "Is he hep?"

"Come on, forget about it," I said, sensing that a row was brewing between the two of them, and not wanting to get caught in the middle. I went on out the front door of the flat awhile, waiting for her to come after me.

The moment my back was turned, the thing erupted. There was a scuffling sound, a scream of rage, and the noise of something falling heavily to the floor.

Then my girl came running out. She didn't stop, but gave my sleeve a tug as she flashed past me. "Come on, don't stand there! As long as she wouldn't give me my cut, I took it away from her anyway." She didn't waste time waiting for the elevator, but went skittering down the stairs, so I went chasing down after her.

"She's liable to call the cops, isn't she?" I said jaggedly as we clobbered down and around and down some more.

"She wouldn't t a k e t h e chance," she answered. "She's running an illegal operation up there and she knows it. They'd close her down in a minute if she attracted their attention."

Before we'd made the street a door opened above and a gin-corroded voice rasped down after us—or after her, I should say—"You're going to get yourself killed one of these nights. And I hope tonight's the night you do!"

We chased out into the street, caught our breaths a minute, and finally hooked arms again.

"Let's go over to my place," she said. "It's not too far from here; we can walk it."

I'd been hoping for this. This was what I'd been aiming at all evening long, ever since I'd first met her. And now it was here,

it had been arrived at. All the intervening hours had proven not to be wasted after all. If she hadn't made her suggestion first, I had fully intended at about this point or not too long after to ask her to come back to my own hotel with me. But this way was better by far; I wasn't at all sure the desk-man wouldn't have stopped us on our way in.

As far as walking there was concerned, I liked that part of it too. I wasn't sure I had enough money left to cover a taxi.

We walked along arm in arm, every now and then lurching a little, first to one side, and then to the other. I couldn't tell if I was responsible, or she was, or it was the two of us together. Oddly enough, the gin seemed to have taken more of a hold out here in the chilly open than it had back in the warm stuffy room. Probably it was the cumulative build-up that was at work.

Presently we'd stepped into what looked like some sort of a furnished rooming-house. There were too many doors up and down the hall for them to be multiple-room apartments. She stood with lowered head chinking a key briefly, and then the door had closed after us and we were in a pitch-dark room.

"Put on the light," I said in an undertone.

"No, we don't need any," she said in an equally confidential voice.

"I can't see where I'm going," I said. "I'll knock myself out."

"Give me your hand," she said. "I'll lead you." Then she added, "The fuse is blown. I have to get it fixed."

I had an impression she was lying. Still, it might have been true for all I knew. It had looked like that kind of a crummy building from the outside.

Something bumped me resiliently across both knees and I fell forward onto an unmade bed. That it was unmade was the least of my worries; it would have been unmade soon enough even if it had been made in the first place.

She settled down close to me, also on her side like I was, and I got ready to love.

I was no expert, but still I had been in this situation before, and it seemed to me from the beginning there was something awry, a block of some kind, a lack of the smoothnes—or rapport might be a better word—that is usually found. There was a sort of intangible opposition there, as when one is wading heavily against resistant water, at a level deep below the surface. At first I thought it was the gin, dulling my reflexes. Then I saw that my reaching

hands were being subtly deflected each time by hers.

I trapped one of her wrists with my hand, and then I caught at the other one, too, only to realize she had a knife in her hand. No wonder the harridan had spoken as she did.

A second more—and she'd have stabbed me.

There was a flash of shock, or mental shock, that was like lightning tearing a black sky to pieces for a minute, dazzling it to unbearable brightness, then slowly going out again.

You must realize I was very young. And when you are young, you do not react normally. I fell sprawling backward across the bed. Then I fell off the bed on my head. There must have been a mat or rug there! It didn't hurt, or if it did I didn't feel it, I was too anaesthetized with shock.

I crawled on all fours over to the wall, and leaned against it, still on all fours. I could almost feel the knife. My stomach kept kneading conculsively, trying to empty itself, and it should have been able to, enough of the gin must still be in it, but the muscles were frozen, nothing would come.

There wasn't a sound around me, the room was deathly still.

If it had only stayed like that, nothing would have happened. I would have finally picked myself up, groped my way to the door, and escaped out into the fresh air.

But first there was this sibilant whispering of the bedclothes, as something cautiously stirred among them. And then a soft slurring sound along the floor, as something crept furtively toward the door. Then three amber lines about the width of a tape-measure, forming three sides of an upright oblong, suddenly appeared against the darkness, as the door stealthily broke contact with its frame.

I sprang—I think from the very crouched position I was in, without bothering to stand first—and the three amber cracks snuffed out, there was the slap of wood back against wood, and I held this thing that had wanted to kill me trapped between my body and the door.

I started to work my arms maniacally, in and out, in and out, in and out, swinging with the blows, from side to side, from side to side, from side to side. These wern't punches, these were death-blows.

For a moment, at the very start, a pitiful voice pleaded: "Please don't kill me, I'll give you money! Don't will be, I'll give you money!" Then after that, there wasn't any more voice to plead.

I didn't want money. There was a basic emotion there as old as the race, before there was ever such a thing as money.

Very soon there was no more small pleading voice. Very soon there was no reflex spastic movement. Very soon there was no anything. The name for that is Death. Death is the Utter Nothing. The Uttermost Nothing.

My arms had grown tired, and still I struck. I was afraid they wouldn't be massive enough, wouldn't have enough strength left, to inflict final total death, so I picked up some metal object I found at random in the dark. I think it was a wastebasket, but it was too flimsy, it dented inward at the first blow. Then I found something else, a chunky cube, scooped out in the middle. A thick glass ashtray, I suppose. That was better.

After awhile I stood still. After awhile the red went out of the world, like sparks settling back into a spent fire.

I couldn't get the door open. The dead thing was lying there blocking its inward arc. I scuffed the obstacle over to the side a little with the backs of my heels, until I could get the door open enough to pass through. Then I stepped over it, and passed through the narrow door-opening I made. I went a little way on my way, and then I looked down at my hand, and I was still holding that heavy cubed thing. It was an ashtray all right, but one side of it had a growth of matted hairs clinging to it. They looked terrible, like some kind of unclean fungus growing out of the thick glass.

I knew it belonged inside, so I went all the way back, threw it back inside the room through the door-opening, and then I went on my way for good.

I don't know why I didn't just drop it where I was; some sense of restoring things to their proper place, I guess; leaving them as you found them.

I couldn't tell the cabman the name of my hotel, but I found the key in my pocket and handed it to him, and he read it off the little tag attached to it and took me there.

The night-clerk had wise knowing eyes; they could spot a dead-beat or a girl hustler trying to get past him from a mile away. But this is one time they were fooled. When he saw me straggle by, holding my coat lapels closed tight under my chin, and shivering all over, all he said was: "Oughtn't to go out without a topcoat if you're not used to it here. Gets very raw late at nights."

Upstairs in the room, all I took off was my shoes. Then I got under the covers just the way I

was. I left the light on. I didn't ever want to be in the dark again for the rest of my life.

After awhile I even pulled the covers up over the top of my head, just left a little hole in them I could breathe through.

And I shook, and I shook, and I shook.

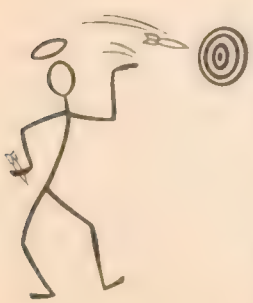
They came and got me late the following day. Somehow—they'd found me. I hadn't even tried to leave the room in the meantime. I didn't want to run away. Running away is all right from a misdeed or even a crime, but not from a nightmare. The nightmare goes right with you as you run. I think I was almost glad when they knocked and I told them to come in. It was like being back among ordinary men again, it was like being back to normalcy again. The shadows went away.

At the trial the prosecutor's attitude toward me was almost fatherly. I know that's a strange word to use of such a person at such a place and such a time, but no other would be accurate. I was young, he said in his summing-up. It hadn't been premeditated. And nobody in that room (meaning I suppose all the men his own age) would want a son of theirs to suddenly come face to face with such a harrowing predicament as I had.

And though he didn't come right out and say it in so many words, his inference was plain. I had taken a life, and therefore I had to be punished for it, I couldn't be allowed to get off scot-free. But it wasn't as though I had *planned* to kill another human being. . . .

They let me out the other day. I'm forty now.

NEXT MONTH –



THE DAYS OF SEPTEMBER **by Julian Symons**
DEAR GRACE **by August Derleth**
DEATH BEFORE BREAKFAST **by Q. Patrick**
CASE OF THE PLEASANT STRANGERS **by Rufus King**
THE COVETOUS HEADSMAN **by Leslie Charteris**

and

INSTRUCTIONS FOR MURDER
A NEW STORY by LAWRENCE TREAT

in the June 1963 issue of THE SAINT MYSTERY MAGAZINE

women are such strange creatures

by Louis Golding

AND DAPHNE was about as strange as any. I met Daphne an awfully long time ago, in the early 'twenties to be exact. She was rich, Scottish, and an actress, quite a lot older than I was. But you know how it is with young men.

I was in love with her, I think; anyhow, I admired her enormously. Then I went and cut my throat, so to speak, and introduced her to Prince Sergei.

Sergei was the most handsome thing that had ever knocked the Cafe Royal sideways. His skin was smoth as alabaster and his face like a bronze fawn's. He wore a black coat, black riding breeches, and a black shirt. (In those days the costume had no political connotation.) And he was a complete mystery.

He allowed it to be known, or at least he did not deny, that he was the legitimate heir to the throne of Muscovy. Ill-disposed people said he was the son of a Belgian tailor from Whitechapel. The next thing one heard was that Sergei and Daphne had

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Louis Golding, author of MAGNOLIA STREET, GOOD-BYE TO ITHACA, and many other books, was one of the Great British writers of our day. A supremely literate man, and a beautiful writer, he often experimented with variations on the theme of the contrariness of the human mind, and its potentialities for good — and evil. *H.S.S.*

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gone off together, to Florence, it was said. I sighed deeply, almost as much for Daphne's sake as for my own. I got over it.

A year or so later I was in Innsbruck. I had very little money, so I had a rather squalid room with a family on the wrong side of the railway-tracks (as they say in another Continent).

One morning my landlady came up, puffing like a steam-engine. You could hear her from three floors down. The hairpins stuck out all over her head like a saint's nimbus.

"Herr Golding!" she brought out at length. "Her Highness awaits you below! She demands you!"

Highnesses? Me. I didn't move in such circles! I went below, and it was Daphne. She was seated in a magnificent trap, her head flung back, her eyes shining, holding the reins like a goddess—or an actress in a stage-play.

"Louis!" she called, her voice warm, and vibrant and wonderful.

"Daphne!"

She bent over towards me like a queen, and we embraced affectionately.

"But where's . . . where's . . .?" I stammered.

"Sergei? He's up in Muhlau, riding in the paddock. You know what these Cossacks are! We're living at the Pension Edelweiss, while we're building our own villa. I heard only today you were in Innsbruck, so I got my spies out at once. You must come and stay up at the Edelweiss, darling, with us. I can't let you stay here! Not another moment!" She looked round with distaste.

"And Sergei?" I asked apprehensively.

"He adores you! He wants you up at once! When the villa's ready you must stay with us for ever! Come, tell that woman to get your things together! We'll go the Gasthaus Koreth and have some of their wonderful *Rahmschnitzel!*"

Well, it was impossible to resist such a gust of energy and affection. I packed my things, and we trotted off smartly to the Villa Edelweiss above the town, beyond the funicular. I settled down to the book I was writing in the room I was given, just across the landing from Daphne's and Sergei's apartment.

There followed two or three of the happiest months I have ever known. Muhlau is a lovely village, with its picture-book houses and the white church on a sugar-cone hill. My room had a balcony and a heavenly view. The food at the Koreth was a bit rustic, but abundant and full of flavour. We drank gallons of red South Tirolese wine.

The three of us would go for the jolliest excursions up the Inn Valley, picking up little wooden saints and paintings behind glass. I even managed to learn to ride. though I always was, and have remained, just a little bit nervous on horseback. It was a grand time.

There was only one fly in the ointment, as they say, but it was a pretty big one. While Sergei treated Daphne by day with full Moscovite courtesy, by night things were different. When I first hear Sergei yelling at the top of his voice at two in the morning—remember, only a landing separated their apartment from mine—I hoped he was merely reciting Pushkin or something. For a time Daphne acted as if nothing was going on. Then came a night when Sergei stormed so continuously that Daphine simply had to do something about it the next day.

"Did you . . . er . . . did you hear anything last night?" she asked me, tentatively.

"Well, as a matter of fact, to tell the truth, I did hear the sound of voices." (It was only one voice I heard, ever.)

"Oh yes. We're doing a play together. We were acting out one of the scenes."

It seemed to be quite a long scene, and it took a good deal of acting and playing out. But that was only at night. By day Sergei was the very model of courtesy, except perhaps to the horses, whom he beat unmercifully whenever they refused at the hurdles he put up for them in the paddock, which was only to be expected from his Tartar blood, I suppose. Daphne adored him.

But one morning she appeared with a black eye. It was a monster. It was impossible to ignore it, yet it was impossible to ask about it. She could have got it from nothing and nobody bu Sergei.

"Oh dear, oh dear!" I said to myself. "He's taken to beating her! What ought I to do about it?" Really, there was nothing to do about it. Not only because Sergei was a good deal bigger than I was but because he always carried a revolver around with him.

He was always shooting at lamps and door handles and things. It cost Daphne a pretty penny. When he wasn't shooting at lamps he was cleaning his guns. He loved chamois as much as he loved horses—and Daphne.

"What are you thinking about?" asked Daphne, that morning of the black eye.

"Oh nothing," I said awkwardly. Then suddenly an impulse got the better of me. After all, *I* had known Daphne first. *I* had

never given her black eyes. Ought one to let this Tartar savage get away with it indefinitely, even if he was the heir to the Romanoffs?

"You mean this?" She pointed to the beefsteak eye.

"Yes, darling."

"I slipped last night in the bedroom. Do you understand, Louis? *I slipped.*"

"Yes, Daphne," I muttered. What else could I do? And by day he was not merely charming but solicitous, not only to Daphne but to me.

We had wonderful days out in the countryside together. We ate enormous meals, washed down with rivers of wine. I was getting on nicely with my book. There was only one thing I could do. I could stuff my ears at night with wax pellets; yes, and pull the feather-blanket over my head. The days were one thing. The nights were another. The months went by.

At last he beat her up so badly one night that next morning she couldn't get up at all.

"What's the matter with the Frau Prinzessin?" I asked Maridl, the landlady's daughter. Maridl said nothing. Instead she burst into tears, and wringing her hands, fled down the stairs.

I crossed the landing, knocked at Daphne's door, and a feeble voice said "Come in." (Perhaps I might not have been so courageous if I hadn't seen Sergei gallop off like a storm on one of his horses.)

"What's he done to you *this* time?" I demanded fiercely. "It can't go on! I've had enough of it!" She had not only black eyes but a bruised mouth too, apart from any injuries that might be invisible under the bedclothes.

"What who done to who, darling?" she wanted to know.

"Don't be stupid! What are you going to do about it? Eh? Why don't you answer?" I felt like giving her a good shaking, except that Sergei had already given her all the shaking she needed for a day or two.

"I love him!" she said simply.

"*Love* him! *Love* him!" I caught sight of the stack of guns in a rack, and, on the table, the pieces of a revolver he was cleaning. "He'll kill you one of these days!" I said.

"Do you think he hasn't tried already?"

"What? He has, has he?"

"Yes, the pet! That's why we had to leave Florence. There was quite a scandal. He pursued me up three flights of stairs in the Hotel Excelsior. I had to take refuge in the bedroom of a German art-historian."

"Daphne! What are you saying? Is it *true?*"

"Of course it's true, darling!

That's why I stay with him. Apart from the fact that I love him, of course. You see, he needs looking after. You see that, don't you?"

"But if he kills you, you won't be there to look after him."

The thought had not seemed to occur to her before.

"I suppose you're right in a way," she said. "Anyway, he *won't* kill me. He *wouldn't!* And please don't talk about it any more. W i l l y o u, darling? Promise?"

She insisted, and I promised. What else could I do? I made up my mind to leave the Pension Edelweiss as soon as the opportunity presented itself. I had a quiet word with the police before I left.

Well, Daphne was right. About a month or so later there was a real to-do at the Pension. The prince roared so loudly and smashed so much crockery everyone else in the place was frightened out of their wits. There was a rare fastening of shutters and pushing of wardrobes in front of doors.

And Sergei *did* take a pot shot at Daphne. I can only conclude that Daphne had been right, and he hadn't intended to kill her. For he was a good shot, and he missed her by a full yard. Then he turned the gun on himself and blew his brains out. You can say what you like about that, but that's what he did.

'I don't know how Daphne contrived it, but she managed to get him buried in that lovely white parish church, perched on its sugar-cone hil. Never had such a funeral been seen before in that village, such wagonloads of flowers, and all the countryside making a gala of it at Daphne's expense, with lashings of wine, and cables of sausage, and shooting competitions in the afternoon, and bands and fireworks till long after midnight, with Daphne presiding over it all like Niobe, Queen of Sorrows.

Every year on the anniversary of Sergei's death Daphne laid flowers on his grave, in mourning garments so chic she must have had them specially built for her in Paris. Her great triumph came when, with solemn ceremony, she put up a stained-glass window in the fairy-tale church to do perpetual honour to his memory.

It is still there, of course. I saw it with my own eyes only a few weeks ago, when I passed through the countryside after an absence of more than thirty years.

I placed some wild flowers on his grave and a bunch of red roses on hers, where she lies, acting no more, beside her Prince of Muscovy.

the silver spoons

by Miriam Allen deFord

REBECCA came to the dairy early on a late November morning, her hands idle as always, seeming so strange where women's hands were always busy, her straight black hair stiff on her shoulders, but color again in her dark cheeks and brightness again in her large black eyes. She had not coughed since a little over her supper the night before, and that might have been the sudden sharpness of the strong ale.

Sukey was bent over the udder of old Bessy, stripping the milk into the pail with skilled red hands; but she did not turn with a rosy dimpling and a flash of teeth as usual. Her eyes were swollen and ready to overflow again.

"Is something ailing you, girl?" Rebecca asked. In these few short weeks she had grown fond of the dairymaid, felt for her as for another girl, only three or four years younger than herself.

Sukey tried to answer, gulped, wiped her eyes with the back of her hand, and fell to sobbing.

"It's Peter, mistress," she man-

Miriam Allen deFord who will be remembered for ARTUR'S STORY (SMM, Feb. 1963) and THE OLEANDER (SMM, Jan. 1962) is the author of several works including the recent STONE WALLS and the earlier THE OVERBURY AFFAIR (both Chilton). Once again she recreates the past, so alike to our days.

aged at last. "They will hang him!"

The lady's first sight of Sukey had come a week after they reached Heacham, two months from the beginning of that long-planned visit to England with John and their baby.

It had not been a success, For so many years she had dreamed of England—of London. When at last John was able to give the time for the year's visit, heaven knows what visions of Paradise, implanted in a child's mind by the strangers so long ago, had not possessed her.

The voyage was a nightmare of sickness. Her young sister had weathered it, so had the friends who came with them, but for her it was as if a wild animal had seized her and would never let her go. Even the baby stood it better than she.

The din and confusion of London deafened and dizzied her; she was confused and outdone by the sight and sound of so many noisy human beings—she who had never before in her 21 years seen more than a few hundred together, and that so seldom.

And now here in the dreary farm over against the Wash in Norfolk, in the square yellow stone house with its pantile roof, on the land half sheep-range, half-fen, where herrings were as important as a crop of wool, she no longer recognized herself. Accustomed to sunshine, to fresh air, to the wideness of freedom, she felt like a prisoner. Accustomed either to unquestioning fealty or to the heady give-and-take of a pioneer democracy, she could not get used to being gaped as a strange monster, or else shouldered aside as a mere adjunct to her husband.

John she scarcely saw. This was his birthplace, his ancestral home, which he had not seen for nearly ten years, and from morning to night he was abroad in it with his brother, or renewing old acquaintance roundabout. Baby Tom was fretful, no longer the placid child of his first months, and took all her sister's time and care—and for the rest her sister was as daunted and subdued as she herself had become. The brother was polite and indifferent. The household was almost puritanical in its prayers and Sunday observance and strictness.

As for her sister-in-law, Henry's wife——

"Lady Rebecca," she said solicitously, "is the cough no better?"

Rebecca frowned.

"We are sisters," she answered curtly, angry with herself because her own acute ear caught her accent in the foreign tongue.

"You need not be ceremonious with he."

"But you are so far above us —you are a princess who is presented at court, and we are but simple folk into whose family you have married."

"That is true. But also I am a farmer's wife, just as you are, and I have worked with my own hands for two years. I have learned to milk cows, and I have made butter and cheese, and they were good."

"See," said the woman eagerly, her good-natured face flushed. "That is just what I was about to say to you. I hear you coughing in the night—our chill and fog and wind are hard on those who are not borne to them.

"We have an old-fashioned country remedy here—perhaps you will laugh at it. The breath of cattle, they say, is good for weakness of the lungs. Sometimes our young girls fall ill as you have done, and then we send them to the dairy to work. No dairymaid who works with the cows has ever been known to suffer that illness."

"I cannot be a dairymaid."

"Of course not." Mer sister-in-law was shocked. "Sukey does all that is needed. I only thought —if you cared to spend some of your time in the air the cattle breathe out—only while you are here and amid this cold of November——

"It is an honor of our family to have had so great a lady marry into it," she said with dignity. "We do not wish it said that you came to us and found only illness here in Heacham Farm."

And then I probably keep you all awake with those exhausting spells of coughing, thought Rebecca wryly. But she felt a thrill of eagerness. Not only her new physical weakness—she who had led all her young companions in running and dancing and swimming, who could turn cartwheels and walk on her hands like any boy—confused and frightened her; in the constraint of this long visit she suffered also from something for which she had no name, since she had never experienced it before. Its name, had she known it, was boredom.

"I would not move my bed," she decided. "But I shall take your counsel, sister, and try your remedy while you are busy all day with your household cares and your weaving, and see if your Sukey is one whose company I could abide so long."

Sukey was golden and plump like fresh country butter, awed and impressed but soon won over to friendly chatter. Rebecca, whose servants had been her playmates and often her

cousins, utterly lacked the English arrogance; in her life, aristocracy had met and coalesced. She could not learn to like cows; she remembered too painfully her early struggles with the creatures in Henrico. But, whether she could thank the fabled benefit of breathing the sweet clover-scented breath of the gentle beasts, or the fresh interest of exploring the little world of another, and relaxing from the constant strain of trying to appear what she was not, she did feel a new strength within her. When she went to the big house to sleep, or for her meals, or to nurse the baby, it was pleasant to know she need not stay.

What most she longed to do was to roam the countryside on foot, with her young sister perhaps for company, as she had roamed her own countryside since childhood. But that of course was unthinkable for the proper goodwife of a settled yeoman farmer.

And now her new peace and vigor were being threatened by this silly girl's hysteria. Rebecca felt a surge of her old imperious anger.

"Hang him?" she asked sharply. "Why should they hang him? What has he done?"

"Nothing!" sobbed Sukey. "He has done no wrong. He swears so, and he never lies. But Higgins will surely have him hanged.

Rebecca sighed. Was the girl stupid, or consciously coquettish? Anyone with half an eye could see that the man Higgins, the farm's overseer and for long Harry's right-hand man, was after the pretty dairymaid. And anyone with half an ear heard from Sukey, from first acquaintance on, about her Peter, who was young and darkly handsome in an uncouth rural way, but no more than one of the dozen farm workers bedded in the big barn-loft, whereas Higgins had a cottage of his own down by the Wash and a decent wage and money saved—to say nothing of the furnishings left by his wife who had died when Sukey was still a village child. Sukey told the world that she and Peter would be married, come Easter; but she smiled on Higgins too, and Higgins bided his time. Rebecca had no doubt that if the older, shrewder man could find a way to rid himself of his rival, he would take instant advantage of it.

The sorry tale came out, bit by bit. Higgins owned a silver spoon, a legacy of his late wife's from her own grandmother. Last night he had found the spoon missing. That very day Higgins had sent Peter to the cottage to fetch a billhook the overseer had

forgotten there. So he had searched the bundle of all the farm laborers in the loft—and in Peter's bundle, wrapped in a handkerchief, was the silver spoon.

"But what would he have done with it?" Rebecca asked. "Everyone here would know it belonged to Higgins."

"He did not take it, mistress. It is a wicked lie. Whoever stole it put it there while Peter was away. But Higgins says Peter would have sold it to a passing and kept the money against our marriage feast. That is what he told the master. So before light this morning the master sent him with Higgins to Heacham, to be lodged in the county jail.

"They will hang him! The spoon is well worth more than 12 shillings—they will hang him surely! Or, if they do not, then they will transport him, and that is as bad, for I shall never see him more. They will transport him to that barbarous—oh!"

Sukey clapped a hand to her mouth, aghast.

Rebecca smiled.

"Exile is exile, child, to whatever land one is sent from home," she said. I have learned that myself too late, perhaps, she thought. And no wonder Henry looked so black at breakfast. All the farm servants were local men and women; he and John had known their parents and their grandparents.

"But did not Peter tell your master he was innocent?" she asked.

"Surely, but what is his word against Higgins's? Peter was at the cottage, he could not deny it. And Higgins swore he had seen the spoon, where he kept it in his chest, before he went down to the field that day."

"Was the chest not locked?"

"He says not. He says, who would have dreamed of such a thing, here where there are no strangers?

"Oh, I shall never see my sweet Peter again, never, never!"

"Cease your bawling, girl!" cried Rebecca, completely out of patience. "Tears will not help you. If Peter speaks the truth, then you must find a way to save him."

"There is no way," sobbed Sukey.

Rebecca turned her face away from the damp, huddled heap wailing on the dairy floor. Bessy, half-milked, mooed distractedly. Rebecca pushed the girl aside and took her place on the milking stool, her fingers remembering the skill they had learned in Henrico. As she worked her mind revolved furiously, hunting for a solution.

It would do no good to speak to Henry, or to John for an ap-

peal to his brother. She was the stranger on this farm where there had never been strangers before, and an unconsidered woman to boot—a woman they would dismiss as swayed by her feelings and fancies. She knew nothing of the customs of English law. Once she had saved a man's life, more than once she had seen to it that justice was meted out to the guilty. But that was in her own country, where her father's word ruled, and in the days when her young strength served her quick wit inexhaustibly. Here she was admired and stared at, but nobody need obey her will; and she was tired and weak and ill. Nevertheless—

"Leave it to me, Sukey," she said crisply, shaking her hair back against her shoulders. "I shall help you. Go on with your work, and leave me to think."

It was a rash promise; nothing came to her mind. It was quite possible indeed that young Peter, whom she scarcely knew by sight, had really been tempted to theft. And if he were hanged or transported, she was cynically sure that sooner or later weak, pretty Sukey would yield to her older suitor. But she disliked Higgins, his oily servility and his bumpkin impudence, and it would be a pleasure to pay him off.

"I'll silver spoon him!" Rebecca muttered, and was rewarded by a gaze of trusting adoration from the dairymaid.

But how?

At noon she walked up to the big house to nurse baby Tom; she was weaning him, but it was a slow process. Her young sister was there, and they talked together in their own language. Gradually a plan had grown. It must be carried out quickly, for there would be no delay; the squire at Heacham Manor was local justice of the peace and would commit the lad at once; at the next quarter sessions Peter would be brought before the grand jury, and trial and sentence would follow immediately.

She did not go back to the dairy, but sat with her sister-in-law, busy at her spinning-wheel in the great farm kitchen, where the two kitchen-maids bustled about cleaning up from the noonday dinner.

Do you know, sister," she said innocently, "my husband has told me much of his family and the holding here they have had for so many hundreds of years, but little of his life here or of the things to interest a woman. What manner was his wife who died? What manner was his mother? You have told me that you were the daughter of a neighboring farm, so you must have known

them well. How did they dress and speak, and what were their looks? I was a child when they lived, but now John is my husband and Tom is his son, and I would know all his past as he knows mine."

For the first time Henry's wife looked at her without constraint.

"That is true," she said. "We forget, because you are a great lady in your own land and honored our family by your marriage, how young you are, and that you must be lonely and long for your home, even though you have your sister with you here to whom we cannot speak, and your countrymen waiting for you in London."

"My sister is no companion to me," said Rebecca. "I have very many sisters and brothers, and this is a child I knew but little, until I chose her to come with us and help me tend my son. When a woman marries, as I feel you know well, since you speak always of 'the family' and mean this one and not the one in which you were born, her husband becomes her world, and if she is to be happy she must feel at one with it. At home that did not matter, since he was the stranger and not I, but here in England I would that I knew this house and my kinsmen as he does and as you do.

"In my father's house, my husband has sat smoking his pipe often with my father and my uncles, and he has seen often the treasures we have from our forbears or which were the spoils of war—the fine fur robes that cover my father's bed, the gold coronet the king of England sent him, the great carved bow my father seized once from a mighty warrior and is now too old and feeble to use. But here I know you must have household treasures also, which perhaps you bring out on great feast days as we do ours, but I do not know what they are, any more than I know the looks and ways of my husband's father or his mother or of his wife who died in Bermuda."

"There is not much," said the woman. "We are simple yeomen and have always been such, and my husband and his brothers, as their father before them, would rather have wide acres than gauds and baubles, unpleasing to God. But I shall search my memory to tell you all I can of those who are dead, and I shall show you gladly the few bits of wealth that have come down to us.

"My mother-in-law was famous for her weaving—there are chests full of the finest linen of her handiwork. There is a goblet of horn with a chased silver rim that they sad has been

400 years in the family keeping. And there is a gold brooch set with pearls that was part of my own dowry, though I have not worn it since my wedding-day, and a set of four heavy spoons of pure silver that were in my husband's grandmother's marriage portion.

"Come with me and I shall open the oak chests in the hall for you—they too are very old—and show you everything. And I shall tell you all my memories of the house and of the family, back to my own childhood when I knew them first.

"Or should you perhaps go back again to the dairy for the hours of daylight? In this short time I can see that my advice was good and that you are in better health; you are not racked with fever as you were before, and I have not heard you cough for two days on end."

"Indeed I am much improved," Rebecca answered, "and I thank you for a remedy I should never have known. I am so well today I shall not be hurt by leaving the dairy for an afternoon, and to be truthful it is not very pleasant there today. The girl Sukey seems to have undergone some grief which makes her but a melancholy companion."

Henry's wife changed color.

"We had not meant to speak of it," she said. "We did not wish to trouble you with our concerns, but my husband is gravely disturbed. One of our workmen has turned out to be a thief, though we had thought all of them to be trusted, since they are from our own countryside, and the sons of those who served our parents. He must be punished, to right the wrong he has done and as a warning to others, and since I believe there was some dalliance between this lad and our Sukey, doubtless that is why she is in the dumps today."

"I suppose so," responded Rebecca lightly. "It is unfortunate, but it has nothing to do with us. Do now show me what is in the chests!"

She clapped her hands with pleasure, and the older woman smiled indulgently as at a child. She chose some keys from the ring handing at her apron belt, and led the way.

"As for my mother-in-law," she said, "she was a little spare woman, from whom Henry got his reddish hair."

She went on talking, but Rebecca paid her little heed. Her mind was busy with other things.

"Must you carry always about with you that heavy ring of keys?" she asked.

Her sister-in-law frowned at the interruption.

"I lay them aside when I go abroad, or when I sleep," she

said. "As I was saying, my mother-in-law was mild of action, but quick of temper in her speech. She could not abide idleness in mistress or maid. I remember—wait, here you will see some of the linen she wove so beautifully. Feel the texture of that sheet."

Rebecca fingered the sheet obediently, murmured admiration, and waited. Her sharp eyes noted the key that opened the black chest—the chest in which lay the silver spoons.

Late that night, when the household slept, Rebecca struggled up from the bed where she lay beside her husband, and her strangled hollow coughing filled the house. She shook John by the shoulder. "Light!" she gasped. Alarmed, he leapt to his feet; his hands trembled as he funbled to light a candle. Rebecca's pillow was disordered, her hair disheveled, her eyes large and wild. Clumsily he tried to lift her as she fought for breath. She shook her head frantically and gestured toward the pallet where her sister lay with baby Tom.

At John's call the little girl jumped up, half-asleep still and frightened into a wail of terror. The baby awoke and started screaming. Rebecca could not stop her coughing. The pandemonium aroused the household. One by one they appeared at the doorway, candles flickering on the nightcaps and worried faces —Henry and his wife, then the serving maids from their cubbyholes in the garret. The sister-in-law took charge; efficiently she soothed the sick girl, forced a healing draught between her lips, settled her, weak and shaking, into a bed remade and smoother.

In all the agitation, with Henry's children too running from their truckle-beds to watch, nobody noticed when Rebecca's sister slipped from the room. Nobody saw her, intent on her orders, dart into the room where Henry and his wife and little ones slept, find the heavy keyring, select the key minutely described to her, run silently to the black oak chest in the hall, unlock it, then return the keys and run back to the room where all the attention focused on Rebecca. By the time everything was quiet again, she was singing the baby back to sleep.

In the morning, Rebecca seemed well, but tired and listless. She would not let them bring her breakfast bread and ale to her, but rose and joined the others in the big farm kitchen. But it was easy to persuade her not to leave the house that day, but to lie and rest in bed until dinnertime at least. The men

were bagging the last of the wool for market, and Rebecca insisted that John join them as he had planed. Her sister-in-law would be there to help if she should have another bad spell, and one of the kitchenmaids could be sent to call him. Reluctantly he left for the shearing-shed at the far end of the farm. Always in his heart was the memory of his earlier loss of his first wife. As soon as could be, he told himself, after the summons to court was over, he must take his wife and son home again. If only another long, dreadful voyage did not lie between them and Henrico!

His spirits lifted when the bell rang for the noon dinner, and Rebecca met him, fresh and smiling, seemingly the healthy, active girl she had been before the trip to England. Her capricious illness was in one of its periods of respite; he dared hope no more than that. Perhaps the crisis last night had marked a climax in its course.

"It is the dairy air that has done me good," she declared. "Had I not deserted it yesterday for the close air of the house, I would not have suffered as I did. I am sure of it, and now I shall return there."

A worried Sukey met her, eyes wide with apprehension. She had heard from the house servants of the lady's illness.

Rebecca laughed.

"It is true enough, I am not well in this chill season," she said. "It is why I come here to breathe this healing air. But as for what happened last night—I told you I would help you, and it was a means to it. How much time is left before your young man will be brought to trial?"

"They say it will be in the first week of December. And November is almost gone."

"They do not trouble yourself, child. Two days from now, if all goes well, Peter will be free. Nay, loose me, girl; it is no custom of my country to kiss the hand!"

In midafternoon, the men were all at work out of sight of the farm buildings, the women busy in the house. Rebecca went there for the child's feeding, and left again, but she did not turn back toward the dairy. Sukey had been instructed, should any inquire for her, to say that she hal felt strong enough to walk a bit by the Wash for exercise.

At supper that evening she seemed still almost the girl, full of life and health, whom John had first known and married. She did truly feel better than for weeks past; excitement and interest had given her at least a temporary stimulation. She who

had been so silent was alive now with talk .

"I must tell you, captain"—so she always addressed her husband in public, shy at calling so much older a man, before his brother, by his given name—"that sister has been showing me your family treasures."

"And what are they?" John asked, laughing. "I knew not we owned treasure in this family, beyond our land and our strong arms to work it."

"Oh, but you do! There is lovely linen that your mother wove, and a brooch with real pearls set in it, and silver spoons, and a silver-rimmed goblet, and I remember not how much else."

"Naught else to amount to much," Henry's wife smiled. "But it is true that I had not opened the chests in which they lie for many years, until the Lady Rebecca craved a sight of them."

"You should see them yourself, before we go again across the sea." Rebecca clapped her hands in the childlike gesture of the day before. "Why not now—now? There is time before we go to sleep—come, sister, show my husband what you showed me!"

"It is late," the mistress of the house objected, "and you should be already in your bed, ill as you were last night."

Rebecca looked so woebegone that even Henry, who scarcely noticed her or anything besides his work, fell to laughing.

"Come, we'll all look," he said. "It is all brother John's inheritance as well as ours, and perhaps we can find among our mother's weaving a piece which can go with you to your home across the seas."

Indulgently Henry's wife rose from the table and searched the ring at her waist for the keys to the big chests. They trooped into the hall after her.

The key to the black chest would not turn.

The woman strained and pulled, but she could not budge it. The men came to her aid, in vain. Then somebody thought to try to lift the lid. It came up at 'once.

"I must have left it unlocked yesterday!" she cried aghast.

"Did you so, wife?" Henry exclaimed. He was angry. "How could you so, only the day after we have caught a thief in our very midst?"

"But he was caught, and was already taken away," she said defensively. Her voice dropped as her husband rummaged through the chest, unwrapping the cloths that wrapped the family heirlooms.

Two of the silver spoons were gone.

It was Rebecca who broke the painful silence.

"This would mean that it was not the lad Peter who stole the other spoon," she said.

"It means that we have still a thief among us," Henry agreed grimly.

He threw the things roughly back in the chest, slammed the lid, and motioned to his wife to lock it. Her hands shook as she fumbled with the key.

"I shall search every serving-man and woman on this place, and all their belongings, and at once, whether they be abed or no. Molly!" he called. The servant girl came from the kitchen, where she and her comrade had been clearing the table.

"Go to the barn and tell them all to come here to the hall," he ordered her. "And wait there to see them leave before you return here. You——" he turned to his wife——"search Molly when she comes back, and Kate now, and then search their bundles in the attic.

"John, when the men come, strip them and search them all. If they be not guilty, they can make no complaint. I shall go to the barn loft when they have left it, and go through their bundles there."

"And sister must search me and my sister too," said Rebecca firmly, "and our belongings as well. Yes, even baby Tom"s clothing, for spoons could be hid in his swaddling bands."

"No, that I will not allow!" John cried. But Henry said: "She is right. To say we would steal from ourselves is folly, but let all of us turn out our pockets and our boxes and bags as well, if we do not find the spoons first among the men or maids. Then none can say we accused only those who labor for us."

"Do not forget Sukey at the dairy," Rebecca added. "And do not forget Higgins and the cottage in which he dwells."

"I would as soon suspect my own brother as Higgins," Henry growled.

"And your own brother, and yourself, wil submit to search, so why not Higgins?" said Rebecca. She sounded very much the imperious princess now; her brother-in-law glanced at her with uneasy awe. "He is in and out the house a dozen times a day on business for you," she pointed out.

The farm servants, bewildered and frightened, were beginning to crowd toward the house. Henry shouldered them aside and turned toward the barn. Halfway there he met the overseer, running from his cottage to see what all the disturbance was about. Henry explained briefly and directed Higgins to join the rest at the house. With a

smile and a shrug the man obeyed.

"You will have your pains for nothing, master," he said in the impertinent maner his trusted service had encouraged in him. "Peter was our only thief."

The barn gave Henry nothing. It was half an hour later that he found the spoons, concealed within the furnishings of Higgin's bed.

He came runing back to the house. John was finishing his last search; the men who already had stripped had dressed again and were standing about the door, some of them sullen, most of them agog with the happy curiosity that seizes the innocent at the chance of witnessing another's discomfiture. Higgins had found himself a stool and placed it a little distance out of doors, like a sheepdog guarding the flock. From above could be heard the voices of the women, and the cries of the baby awakened in his cradle, mingled with the treble lulling of Rebecca's small sister, trying to soothe him back to sleep.

John at sight of his brother's face, ran out and took Higgins by the arm and led him indoors.

"Wife! Sister! All of you, come down!" called Henry. "The spoons are found!"

There was an instant's dreadful silence when Henry had told them. Then Higgins, white and staring, found his voice.

"It is not true!" he choked. "I swear by almighty God it is not true! I never saw these spoons before! It must be the thief Peter who took them with mine, and some other has sought to avenge him by taking them from his hiding-place and concealing them in my bed."

His eyes sought Sukey, standing flushed and near tears among the women. She looked away from him.

"That could not be," said Henry coldly. "It is only yesterday that my wife showed them to the Lady Rebecca here. And Peter was then already in Heacham jail, so he could not have stolen them."

"Then some other stole them and laid it to me, to confound my charge against him."

"More like," said Henry, "you wanted Peter out of your way, because he learned of still other thefts of yours, and so you placed your own spoon in his bundle to involve him, knowing full well none would listen to his charge against you when he himself stood under acusation."

Higgins threw up his arms in anguished denial. All his impudence had fallen from him; he was pale with terror.

"That is not true, master!" he shouted. "I have never stolen

now or earlier, so how could he have learned of any theft of mine?"

"I swear that was not the reason I hid my spoon with him!"

Then he realized what he had said.

It was Rebecca who broke the shocked hush.

"Now I will tell you what I have done," she said calmly. "No one has known of it but me, except for the child my sister, who understood not what her errand for me meant, and Sukey the dairymaid, who perhaps guessed a little of what I surmised, but knew not how I went about it to aid her.

"Higgins did indeed accuse Peter falsely, to have the lad hanged or transported, that he might take pretty Sukey for his own."

She paused, and they all heard Higgins's gasp.

"I feigned my illness last night—alas, I have had experience enough of late to know how best to feign it—and while you were all about me, my sister went at my bidding to take the key-ring, unlock the black chest, and return the keys to brother Henry's bedroom. This morning I found a chance to be alone in the hall, when they thought me abed; I opened the unlocked chest, took the spoons, and hid them on my person. This afternoon I left the dairy and went to the man Higgins's cottage and hid them in his bed. I spoke of the treasures at supper tonight, and asked that my husband be shown it, that this might happen which has come to pass.

"I have seen cheats and bullies before, and I have seen them dealt with—you know it well, captain. I was certain that this man would give way under terror for his own neck, and could be brought thus to confess what he had done. And so he has, even more easily that I expected."

"But why, Rebecca?" asked her baffled husband. "Why did you so?"

"Because I wil not see injustice done. Because now this man, who would have sent a lad to his death that he might seize upon a poor defenseless girl who desired him not, is caught by his own weapon. Because now you, brother Henry, can be well rid of him, and haply some day find Peter more apt than Higgins to be a loyal overseer of your farm.

"Because I am of your family now, and I protect my own and avenge wrong done against them," said the Lady Rebecca Rolfe, who had been Pocohontas, the daughter of Powhatan.

what's new in crime

Margaret Scherf's thoroughly delightful THE DIPLOMAT AND THE GOLD PIANO (Doubleday, $3.50) is a welcome departure from the trend towards the stereotyped in the description of the victims of the unpleasant practical joke that is played on Pierre Marie Cloche, Ambassador to the United Nations from Gaad. Ambassador Cloche and his wife will confuse those who have become accustomed to the approach to life of the spokesmen for some of the other new nations, or such approaches as are considered news in the public press. They will remind more than one of the upper class Haitian who, in pre-Duvalier days, would have been met at the United Nations.

The Cloches are exposed, as I said, to an extremely unpleasant joke, intended to embarrass both the Ambassador and his Government. There is a murder, in an early effort to exploit a situation where even an Ambassador may be suspect, and there is still another murder. Emily and Henry Bryce, the interior decorators innocently involved from the outset, continue to be involved through to the mildly zany end.

Thoroughly delightful. By all means read this!

Marriage seems to have subdued Lt. Luis Mendoza. There is no other explanation for his lessened reliance on Freudian explanations every time it rains—or things get complicated . . . As a result, Dell Shannon's new Mendoza mystery, DEATH OF A BUSYBODY (Morrow, $3.50) is a sound police procedure novel as the Los Angeles Police Department searches for the killer of the unpleasant Margaret Chadwick. Was it her sister? Her father? The man she was engaged to? The list of possibles seemed inexhaustible. . . . Do read this.

Louis Felder's ROCKY LIBIDO IN SAN FRANCISCO (Contact Editions, Sausalito, $3.95) is apparently the first of a series of novels about the adventures of Rocky, "errant poet, criminal, lover". Supposedly "a hilarious spoof of the Hammett-to-Chandler-to-Spillane school of murder and mayhem" it is a strange excursion, in the Kerouac tradition, into the world of Rocky Libido, poet, admitted hero, and perhaps poseur.

H.S.S.

the red rose of death

by Wenzell Brown

THROUGHOUT the centuries the penalty of death has been imposed upon many a person for the most trivial of offenses. But perhaps there is only one incident where an individual has been executed for the gracious act of presenting a lady with a rose.

The donor of the rose was Mrs. Christian Stevenson. The place was Bermuda. The date was 1653.

Mrs. Stevenson was a jolly, buxom widow in her mid-forties with dark brown hair and a clear complexion. She lived in a roadside cottage on the outskirts of what was then the tiny town of Hamilton. One bright sunny afternoon she was tending the flowers in her garden when she espied a young matron passing along the roadway. Plucking a bright red rose from one of her bushes, Mrs. Stevenson went to the gate and smilingly offered it to her neighbor, a Mrs. Butler.

The rose was accepted with expressions of gratitude and Mrs. Butler raised it to her nose to sniff its fragrance. The two women chatted gaily for a few minutes and then Mrs. Butler continued on her way home.

The story of a crime may need to be told in a novel — or perhaps a vignette such as this will suffice, telling what happened in Bermuda, three hundred years ago. Wenzell Brown is of course nationally known for his many novels, socio-documentary in nature, dealing with crime among our young — in our time.

Just outside of her house Mrs. Butler was seized with "the vapors"—trembling and weakness. Her body broke out in a cold sweat and she was scarcely able to stumble into the house and fall upon her bed. She was ill for many weeks with what may have been any one of half a dozen tropical ailments.

In all probability no linkage would have been established between the gift of the rose and Mrs. Butler's illness if it had not been for her friendship with a man named John Middleton to whom she confided that her last act before her seizure was to sniff the rose which Mrs. Stevenson had given her.

At this time Bermuda was in the throes of a witch-hunt in which the prime instigator was the governor, Josias Ffoster. In all, twenty-two people were accused of "conspiring with the devil." The most prominent among these was John Middleton. He survived the ordeal by water and, inasmuch as he did not drown, he apparently decided that he really was a witch. He wrote a detailed confession in which he begged forgiveness for "fourteen grievous sins," which ranged from stealing turkeys and playing truant in his school days to blasphemy and adultery.

Before his execution, Middleton was urged by members of the clergy to identify other witches in the community. After groping about in his memory, he dredged up the rose-sniffing incident which had caused Mrs. Butler to be "much-troubled, ill and sick."

Mrs. Butler was interrogated and accused Mrs. Stevenson of having cast a spell of black magic upon the rose so that the scent of it had caused her illness. Mrs. Butler's daughter, who had picked up the rose from the spot where her mother had dropped it, added another damning detail to the accusation. The rose, she claimed, had turned an unnatural black color upon striking the ground.

Mrs. Stevenson was placed under arrest and a "jury" of seven ladies was assigned to the task of searching her body for warts or birthmarks which were described as "teates or markes upon which imps do suck" The unfortunate woman was forced to strip naked and lie upon a board while one lady after another examined her. Her skin was without blemish, but her tormentors were not satisfied. Inside her mouth they found "two small teates or dugges" which when pricked with pins and needles, did not bleed. Each of the seven ladies took turns in probing Mrs. Stevenson's mouth with pins.

The evidence of Witchcraft was deemed so conclusive that the customary ordeal by water was dispensed with in Mrs. Stevenson's case. A charge was promptly lodged against her "of abominably having consulted, contracted and censented to and with the devil to become a witch."

Mrs. Stevenson was condemned to hang but, unlike many others accused of witchcraft, she maintained her innocence to the very end. On the scaffold she denied any knowledge of black magic or the supernatural and exclaimed in a bewildered fashion, "I did nought but give unto the woman a rose."

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smudges of death

by Robert Andrea

THE GIRL'S body lay slumped across the straw-matted *tatami* floor. Her bright yellow and white kimono was askew, as if there had been a struggle, and part of her body was naked where the garment had been torn away. There was a trickle of blood that had dried at the left corner of her mouth and, most important of all, there was a purple-ringed and blood-caked bullet hole in her left temple.

Inspector Mitsuo Watanabe of Tokyo Metropolitan Police watched with intense eyes as the medical examiner made his on-the-scene investigation. The Inspector was a short, chubby, round-faced man in his middle fifties. His still thick gray-black hair was neatly combed and his conservative dark brown suit was meticulously pressed.

The medical examiner completed his task and gave way to the men from the morgue.

Inspector Watanabe motioned the doctor to his side. "Well, what did you find, Someya-san?" he asked in Japanese.

The medical examiner shrug-

Robert Andrea is the pseudonym of a young U. S. Air Force man who has lived in Japan and now lives in Hawaii with his wife. Mr. Andrea, who is serving, at the time of writing, in South East Asia, is a frequent contributor to this and similar magazines. Here we get an idea of how the Tokyo Metropolitan Police handle a murder case.

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ged nonchalantly. "Not much. I'll have to make a more thorough examination at the morgue. But I think it would be safe to say that she was killed almost instantly. I believe the bullet is lodged in her brain."

"Umm." The Inspector lighted a cigarette. "Call me if you find out anything else," he told the doctor.

Moving over to the small window of the room, he looked out at the night sky. The rain and clouds had gone away finally, and the stars were out, gleaming like a broken string of pearls that lay scattered against a black velvet showcase.

The Inspector turned away from the window and began to search through the house, looking for something but not knowing yet what it was.

There were only three rooms and a kitchen. The room in which the dead girl was found was small and devoid of any furniture except the barest essentials. It had been used by her as a bedroom, and her thick feather-stuffed *futon*, a sort of portable mattress, was rolled against one corner of the wall.

Seeing nothing unusual in the bedroom, the Inspector moved to the living room. There was a door there, and looking down at the floor, the Inspector saw a few smudges of mud on the otherwise spotless matwork. He called to one of the uniformed policemen.

"These mud imprints," he told the man. "I want you to call the lab and have them come out and make an impression of them. And be careful that no one steps on the imprints until they get here. Understand?"

"Yes, sir," the policeman said.

Inspector Watanabe went next into the other room, also used as a bedroom. He looked at the young girl who sat in front of the low coffee table, her legs folded under her body.

She was about twenty-five, he guessed. Her hair was long and combed straight back. She had a pretty face, but her eyes, dark and radiant, were wet from crying. She was wearing Western clothes, a white tight-fitting blouse that showed off her figure and an equally tight blue skirt.

"Forgive me for interrupting you," Inspector Watanabe said softly. "But I'm sure that even in your grief for your sister, you realize we must waste no time in looking for her murderer."

The girl wiped her eyes dry with a piece of tissue paper. She looked up at the Inspector and said. "Yes . . . . I understand."

"Tell me, Miss Nakamura, is there anyone who would have wanted to kill your sister?"

"No," the girl said. "That's

why this has been such a shock. Kimiko was always the one who kept on the straight path. If anyone deserved to die, it was me. She——she was a simple, sweet girl, Inspector. Her biggest pleasure in life was to make others happy."

The Inspector mused for a second. He said, "Did your sister have any men friends? Any who might have become tired of her straight ways and tried to force her to compromise herself. She looked as though she'd been through a struggle."

"No," the girl said flatly. "The men Kimiko dated, they were all from good families. All gentlemen. I'm sure none of them would have done this to her."

"Ah, but even gentlemen sometimes have moments of weakness and evil, Miss Nakamura."

The Inspector glanced around the room. His eyes came to rest on a photograph that lay on the girl's dresser. The man in the picture was a foreigner he noticed, and it was a foreigner the smudges next to the door pointed to. "Forgive me if I seem to pry into your personal life," he said, "but that photo on your dresser. Is that one of your sister's friends?"

The girl's eyes darted over to the photo. "No," she answered. "Kimiko would go out only with Japanese men. The man in the photo"—she bowed her eyes to the floor—"is one of my . . . acquaintances."

"May I ask his name?"

"But I don't see what——"

"Miss Nakamura, you must cooperate with me if you want us to find your sister's assassin."

"He . . . He's Philip Reed," the girl murmured. "An American. He works for the World-Wide press bureau here in Tokyo."

"Did he know Kimiko very well?"

"No. Hardly at all. Really, Inspector, Philip couldn't possibly be mixed up in this."

"Until we find the murderer, everyone must be a suspect," Inspector Watanabe said calmly. "I would like to have the American's address, Miss Nakamura."

"But——"

"I can get it very easily from his office," the Inspector told her.

"All right," she said. "I'll give it to you."

Before he left the Nakamura sisters' home, Inspector Watanabe talked to the laboratory men who were making the impression of the smudges next to the door.

Then he went back to his office at the station, where he received a complete report from

the medical examiner on the girl's death.

After going over all he knew, the Inspector decided to go to the American newspaperman's home and question him. The pieces of the puzzle were still confusing, but the Inspector was almost certain a foreigner was involved, and thus far the newspaperman, Philip Reed, was the only foreigner the Inspector had come across.

Sitting in the back seat of an unmarked police car on the way to Reed's home, the Inspector wished that he had not studied in California before the War. Those four years at the American college had made him quite fluent in English. If it were not for that, he could now turn the case over to someone else. It was always unpleasant to question foreigners about a murder. Inspector Watanabe sighed and hoped that the case would be over soon.

Philip Reed lived in a large Western-style home in the Shibuya district. The Inspector told the driver to wait, then walked up to the front entrance and rang the door bell.

Soon the door opened and Inspector Watanabe was confronted by a middle-aged woman with dark circles under her eyes and too much makeup on her face.

"Yes?" she said.

The Inspector had assumed that Philip Reed was a bachelor, but guessed that he was wrong when he saw the wedding band on the American woman's finger. One more piece of the puzzle, the important piece, perhaps, had been found.

He said, "I am Inspector Watanabe of the Tokyo Police. Does Mr. Philip Reed live here?"

"Why, yes," the woman replied. "Is anything wrong?"

"Is Mr. Reed in? I'd like to talk to him for a while."

"Yes, he's home. Please come in."

She led the Inspector into a well decorated, half Western, half Oriental living room. A tall, slim man with a handsome, dark-complexioned face and a very straight posture was sitting on the sofa.

Mrs. Reed said, "This is Inspector Watanabe of the Police, Phil darling. He'd like to talk to you."

The Inspector said, "If you don't mind, Mrs. Reed, I would like to talk to your husband privately."

"Of course," the woman said with a frown. She moved off to another room.

"Won't you sit down, Inspector?" Philip Reed asked, smiling faintly.

The two of them sat across

from each other, Reed on the sofa and Inspector Watanabe on a large stuffed chair.

The Inspector said, "Mr. Reed, a woman was murdered tonight. Her name was Kimiko Nakamura. Did you know her?"

Reed lunged forward in his chair. "Kimiko —— murdererd? Good Lord, whatever for?"

"The murderer," Inspector Watanabe said, "shot the girl in the head with a .38 caliber pistol. It was made to appear that the girl was sexually attacked, but I am assured that such is not the case. Rather interesting, don't you think?"

"Yes, but . . . but what has that to do with me?"

"I talked to the dead girl's sister, Yoko," the Inspector went on "She told me that you were a friend of hers. Precisely how close was your relationship, Mr. Reed?"

"Well, we, uh, were rather close, I'd say."

"I must ask you to be more exact, Mr. Reed," the Inspector said firmly, his dark brown eyes staring at the American. "Would you say that you and Miss Nakamura were having an affair?"

Reed looked at the door leading to the room his wife was in. It was closed. "If you must know," he replied, "yes, we were having an affair. But see here Inspector, what does that have to do with Yoko's sister being killed?"

"Infidelity often leads to violence, Mr. Reed. May I ask if you own a .38 revolver?"

Reed's eyes grew wide. "Yes, I have one."

"Ah, everything is becoming clear now," the Inspector said. "Mr. Reed, I would like to have your pistol. And would you please call your wife back?"

"My wife? But why must we drag *her* into this? She doesn't even know about Yoko. I've told you all I know, and as for that pistol, I'd be glad to let you check it. You'll see that it hasn't been fired in over a year"

"I'm afraid you are mistaken, Mr. Reed. Please let me have the weapon, and call your wife."

Reed hesitated, then got up from the sofa and went to the door that led to the next room. He opened it and asked his wife to come into the room. She walked through the doorway looking nervous and distraught.

Inspector Watanabe waited until Reed brought him the .38 pistol from the other room, then said, "Mrs. Reed, you knew that your husband was having a love affair with Yoko Nakamura, didn't you?"

The woman looked at the pistol in the Inspector's hands. Finally she said, "Yes, I knew."

Her husband walked over to

her side. "Laura," he said, his face flushed with surprise, "why didn't you tell me you'd found out?"

"Would it have made any difference, Phil?" she asked. "Would you have stopped if I'd asked you to?"

Philip Reed didn't say anything.

The Inspector said, "Mrs. Reed, did you go to the home of Miss Nakamura this evening?"

"I——I'd rather not answer that," the woman murmured, her voice edgy and her face pale.

"Laura," her husband cried, "you didn't——you couldn't have ——"

"You were quite clever, Mrs. Reed," Inspector Watanabe said. But there were three serious mistakes you made. Item one: You killed the wrong girl. Apparently you didn't realize that your husband's girl friend had a sister, and when you went to the Nakamura residence and found Kimiko there alone, you shot her without realizing she was the wrong one. Her sister came home several hours later and found the body."

Laura Reed sat down on the sofa. "I guess I've made a mess of everything," she said quietly.

"Item two," the Inspector went on. "You tried to make the murder look like a sex crime, so the police would be looking for a man. But you forgot that a doctor can detect that kind of thing.

Inspector Watanabe looked at Mrs. Reed's high-heeled shoes, then said, "Those are very attractive shoes you're wearing, Mrs. Reed. May I ask how long you've been in Japan?"

"Several years," she answered. "But what does that have to do with——"

The Inspector cut in, "We Japanese have a proverb, Mrs. Reed, 'Those who do evil are often careless.' And that leads to Item three: You were so concerned with killing the girl, you forgot to take off your shoes when you entered her home. We found next to the door an excellent print of a woman's high-heeled shoes. It was raining earlier tonight when you went to the Nakamura home. The soles of your shoes were covered with moisture and mud. In your haste to kill the girl, you forgot to observe one of the first customs that a stranger in Japan learns. It was the shoeprints on the floor that made me look for a foreigner I knew that no Japanese, not even a murderer, would forget to observe such a time-honored tradition."

The Inspector got up from his chair. "You'll have to come along with me, Mrs. Reed," he said.

keeping livestock healthy

by Avram Davidson

THE L.M. Clayton College of Agriculture lay near the northern border of the county and the cities lay near the southern border and in between were the farms and the ranches and the orchards, the dairies and feeding-lots. It was beautiful country, rich and sleek and proud, and the Ag School was built and furnished with no niggardly appropriation. There wasn't a single wooden shack or quonset hut on the campus. The buildings had been designed by the best school archietect in the State. Rich men's sons attended there. The place had made headlines twice, once when it was dedicated.

Each of the fifteen dorms had ten rooms and in each room were two beds, two closets, two chests-of-drawers, and two desks. At one of them Underwood, a livestock major, was scowling over a book. "Amoebae, balantidia, coccidia, and sarcosporidia."

His room-mate, Clark, looked around. "I'd be obliged to

This writer once called Avram Davidson (nowadays Editor of the Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction) a "gentle classicist". When next we met he stroked his beard thoughtfully and questioned, his eyes gleaming, the accuracy of the description. The present story, exploring as it does by paths in our national thinking, would seem to bear him out. But this is of course not true. H.S.S.

you, Ted," he said quietly, "if you could study to yourself . . . I've asked you before." Clark was a big fellow. He never raised his voice.

Ted Underwood swung around. "There never used to be all this trouble about raising hogs," he said, frown gone now, a cheerful smile on his small and round face. "I remember when I used to visit my granddad's farm—"

Dick Clark paid no attention, continued to study his feeding charts.

"——you got up in the morning, you slopped the hogs——'hawgs', he used to call it——when it came time you put in the boar, then you took out the boar, by and by you maybe gave the sow a hand when she farrowed. You drew the wolf teeth. Then in the fall——"

Clark cleared his throat. Dick stopped. For a moment only. "'And now you got to know all this about parasitic diseases," he went on. He glanced again at the book. "'Keeping Livestock Healthy'", he read the title. "I keep grinding away here, *I* ain't going to be healthy. Sicken up and die." He clapped the book shut, rose and stretched.

"All work and no play . . . Come *on*, Dick! Le's close up that old note-book. Go down to the village, shoot some pool, drink a few beers, maybe pick up some girls."

Dick looked at him. "Go ahead and waste yourself, if you want to," he said. "I came here to school for a different purpose."

Ted shrugged. "Don't you ever let down your hair? What are you, religious or something?"

"Not in any theological sense," Clark said. "I have my own code."

Ted nodded, grinned. "The Superior Man and all that . . . I know. But, listen . . . until you and these other Superior Men set up your Perfect State and the, um, Board of Eugenics, to pass on matings—how are you going to select the future *Mrs.* Clark? Answer me *that*?"

"Don't worry about me . . . when the time comes . . ." His voice was low.

Ted jumped into the air, clicked his heels together. "Well, this chicken can't wait," he said. He put on his jacket. "Every time is the time for me . . . I'll bring you back a full report," he said, winking and grinning from the door.

"Another one of your disgusting stories, you mean."

Ted smirked. "You always listen, I notice," he said. "Maybe you're keeping a secret dossier on me . . . rub me out when

the Superior Men take over . . . Bye . . ."

For a while there was no sound in the room but the faint hum of the lighting tube. Then Clark got up, went over to the door and locked it. He glanced at the venetian blinds. Silently he went over to his room-mate's chest - of - drawers, opened it. From underneath a loose pile of underwear (quite different from the neat arrangement of his own things) he drew a magazine. Once again he looked around. Then he sat down at his desk and opened the magazine. It was filled with glossy photographs. The captions were in French. Slowly he turned the pages.

The canteen was due to close at ten. By nine-forty-five it was crowded with young men in for the last cup of coffee. As Dick Clark came in, a group gathered around Byers, the Zoology teacher, fell apart with great bursts of laughter.

A weak voice asked, "Doc, where in the *hell* do you *get* these stories? Do you make them up or read 'em in a book?"

Dr. Byers, his pleasantly ugly face lit up with a smile, said, "Nonsense. It's a true account, well-known to everyone in the wool-trade. Just you ask Hockins, the Sheep Husbandry instructor." The students laughed again.

Clark got a container of milk, sat down by himself. Byers noticed him, waved. Clark nodded. "Hi, Dick," said the teacher. "Still living a clean life, I see. No coffee, tea, orange crush, or other vile stimulants." The young men laughed.

"I understand you were unable to interest Johnny Lindoe, here, in the doctrines of the great Nietzche," said Byers.

Johnny Lindoe, his voice still weak from laughter, quavered, "I thought it was a Japanese newspaper!" That brought down the house again. Clark finished his milk and left. Several fellows said good night to him, but he didn't answer.

Next morning, while Ted Underwood lay sprawled in bed, his clothes a tangled heap on the floor, Clark arose, took a cold shower, did his calisthenics, read three pages from an improving book. By the time he was finished it was time for breakfast.

He came back from breakfast to find the room cluttered with Underwood's possessions. Underwood himself stood and scratched his uncombed head. "Dick—" he began.

"What's the matter?"

"Dick—well—I had five dollars in my bottom drawer . . .

I can't find it."

Clark grimaced, clicked his tongue. Then his head snapped up.

"Was it there when you went out last night?" he asked.

Underwood considered, nodded slowly. "Guess so. Why?"

Clark smashed fist into palm. "Then it's *my* fault," he said. "I went out to the canteen last night . . . I always lock the door . . . but my keys were in my other pants and I didn't think about till I came back."

Underwood thought, then shook his head. "I dunno . . . I hardly ever remember to lock the door. Maybe it was then . . . maybe another time . . . Because I'm not the only one's had things missing this term . . ." He put on his shirt. Then he asked, "Uh . . . did you notice anyone out in the sitting room when you left or came back? Not that——"

Clark nodded brusquely. "Yes. But I'd rather not say. I admit I don't like—"

"Alfie Tohber? Was it Alf?" Slowly the other nodded.

"I admit I don't like him. I think he's a very decadent type. But the mere fact that he was out there when I left is no evidence."

Underwood sighed. "Yeah, he *is* kind of wormy. But, like you say, that don't prove anything." His face soon brightened. "Oh, well: easy come, easy go. Got to call up Popper a day earlier, is all. Sausages for breakfast, Dick? *Yeah?* Oh, boy!" He left, greeting the other late breakfast-goers with a cheerful yell of, "Lock the doors! There's a thief in the house!" And then, his thoughts changing rapidly—"Hey, did I ever make out last night! Y'know this girl, Chickie's her name, works in the drug store——"

Sanders, the Dairy Science instructor, stood by his desk. He was discussing the standards used in choosing a good cow.

"Lindoe says, 'What's her own milking record?'—All right, good enough, but let's say she's still a heifer. Well. Of course, you got to check and see what her sisters have done, what her dam has done, check her sire's record and all that. But there are certain qualities visible in the animal herself. Starting with, say, the udder. Make sure all four quarters are well-formed. And they should be level with one another—Yes, Clark? You wanted to ask something?"

Clark stood beside his seat, tall and straight. "Can you explain, Mr. Sanders, how it is that we place such emphasis on proper standards in the breeding of animals, and in the breeding of human beings—"—some of the students laughed— "which is of

infinitely more importance—"—some of the students groaned. Clark's voice rose—"—we don't apply any standards at all?"

Sanders blinked. A voice from the middle of the class-room said, "Clarky, he thinks the wrong kind of people, they shouldn't be allowed no love life."

Mr. Sanders said, "Well, I dunno, Clark—you carry a yard-stick along on your dates?" The class burst into laughter. Clark so obviously was not going to laugh along with them—he scowled and it was an ugly scowl—that a note of derision came into the laughter. Mr. Sanders said, "Not that I—I mean, I don't mean to make *fun* of your ideas—"

Clark said, "I don't care if you do or not. People sooner or later will wake up. In breeding cattle we eliminate the inferior stock. Up till a few hundred years ago we let them breed by chances and happenstance. Just like we do now with human beings. We don't take a defective bull or a stupid sheep-dog, let's say, and put them to stud, do we? We take good care they don't contaminate the blood-lines. Sooner or later we will have to do the same things with the human race. The defective man, the stupid woman—necessary steps will have to be taken—"

Sanders flushed. "Now, just a minute there, Clark. Who's going to do the judging? Who's going to set himself up like a god? How are you going to say to someone who hasn't the good luck to be in as good shape as you or as smart as you—and just how are you going to prevent—"

Clark started to answer before the teacher finished, several other students joined in, and the class was in a state of bedlam when the bell rang.

That evening Underwood tried in vain to get a good word from his roommate.

"You coming to the barbecue?" he asked. "Why don't you get some girl and bring her to the barbecue? Be a good dance afterwards Dick?"

Clark said nothing, slumped over his note-book. Ted tried again. "You went to the village today? Didn't you? I say, 'You went—'." No answer.

Underwood, baffled, returned to his copy of "Keeping Livestock Healthy". But the chapter on "Cattle Scab And Its Control" failed to hold his interest, and he swung around once more. "You hear the latest? The Phantom struck again. Floyd Fritz left a dollar and some change on his bed when he went out for basketball this afternoon; when

he came back—gone." But there was no response. Ted yawned, closed the book, got up, peeked out the window, sat down again, got up. "This brilliant conversation here is too much for me. I'm going over to Dorm Nine, in case my broker should call."

He was greeted by a cheerful babble in Dorm Nine. Someone was playing records. Someone was singing the words. A card game was in progress. Underwood inspected the hands, shook his head, sat down on the floor near the record player.

"How's your buddy, old Dick Nietzche?" Johnny Lindoe asked him.

Dick shook his head. "He's the original tall and silent man," he said.

"Maybe he's brooding about this tall, not-so-silent blonde he met over at the village this afternoon," Johnny suggested. Ted sat up.

"*What* blonde?" he asked. "Dick Clark was talking to a blonde? *Really?*"

Johnny nodded. "He came out of the shoe store with this shoe box under his arm," he said, "and he dropped 'em and they rolled out—and let me tell you," he said, "they were some classy pair of clompers, too! I saw the same ones in the window: nineteen-ninety-five . . ."

"But the blonde—the blonde—" Ted prompted him.

"Oh, yeah . . . this blonde came along with a bag of groceries and when he dropped the shoes almost in front of her she kind of shied and dislodged some of the groceries and they were really tangled up there for a minute. Well, he got the stuff picked up and they fell into conversation, you might say. And so I left them . . . built real nice, she was," he added, reflectively. "Wore a blue jacket. Looked real good on her."

One of the card-players looked up. "I know who you mean," he said. "Elaine Glenn. Her dad owns the John Deere agency. She don't talk to just *anybody*."

Underwood whistled. "Why *I* know *her*," he said. Johnny Lindoe said, "Well, maybe the Superior Man has finally met the Superior Woman." Ted Underwood said, "Yeah, how 'bout that?"

Back at his room later, he wondered if he should mention the blonde to Clark; josh and jolly him about her. He decided not to.

It was the next afternoon that he burst into the room. Clark, for once, wasn't studying. He was polishing his new pair of shoes. Underwood paused a minute to get his breath. Then

he said, "Hey, Dick—how about letting me have that buck you borrowed last week?"

Clark looked up briefly. "Haven't got it," he said. "In a few days—"

"A few *days?*" Ted was annoyed. "Well, say, how come you had the money to buy those slick shoes, then?"

Clark's face tightened. "That's *my* business," he said. Ted's displeasure grew.

"Well, never mind," he snapped. "I'll get it from somewhere else. I wanted it for a date tonight. Some statuesque blonde from the village . . . name of Eleanor Glenn," he said, watching Clark closely.

His room-mate's head snapped up. He looked at the smaller man, glared.

"Do *you* know her?" he barked. Ted smiled.

He raised his eyebrows, smirked "Do I *know* her? Boy, do I ever know her! I could tell you stories—but you wouldn't care for them. You'd call them disgustin,' I guess."

Clark shot up from the chair and fetched him a crack across the face that sent him spinning. He took a step towards him, then stopped. Ted got to his feet slowly, rubbed his face.

"I ain't going to fight with you," he said, thickly. "You could tear me into two pieces; I know that." Clark looked at him with burning eyes. "You can keep the dollar. But I'm going over to the Administration Building and get my room changed. You're just too damned superior for me." And then, in a late burst of rage he shouted, "And you can just give me back those cuff-links you borrowed, too!" He lunged for a drawer, Clark lunged for him, but too late: Ted's furious tug brought the whole desk and its contents clattering out.

"Here they are," Ted muttered. Then he stopped, stared. "And these are Jack Dawson's pearl studs," he said, slowly. "Fred Novick's diamond pin. and these others . . . "He looked up, his face twisted into a grimace of distaste.

Clark said, softly, "All right. You see it. Now look at what else I took. You might as well look at everything. See? *See?*"

A short time later a group of students came into the dorm and fell into the chairs. "Boy, am I *pooped!*" said one. "Where'd I ever get the idea that horticulture was a course requiring little or no labor? If I carried *one* of those sacks of whatever-it-is, I carried *thirty.*" The others nodded. For a moment nobody said anything. Then the one who had spoken raised his head.

"What's that noise?" he asked.

The answer wasn't long in coming. Johnny Lindoe burst into the room.

"Where's Ted Underwood?" he gasped. *"Listen!"* He put up his hand.

After a minute one of them said, "I *thought* I heard—sounds like a *gun!*"

Lindoe nodded, his chest straining. "It's Clark—he blew his top! He got hold of Jack Dawson's Army pistol somehow —*And he shot Doc Byers!*"

"What!" They were incredulous.

"Yeah, he *did*—I swear—— But he didn't kill him. And he shot *at* Mr. Sanders. He come busting in down at the Faculty Lounge yelling and screaming. 'Dirty-minded imbeciles!' he yelled, and 'The time has come to take measures!' he yelled, and I don't know *what-all* else he was yelling——"

The young men looked at one another. Hesitantly, they got to their feet. "He always *was* crazy," one said, "But what made him flip his lid *now?*" They took uncertain steps towards the door.

Johnny shook his head. *"I* dunno . . . Mr. Thompson, the Custodian, he got his hunting rifle out and he's got Clark penned up in the Faculty Lounge. They called the Sheriff's Station—" One of the young men said, without conviction, that maybe they should go down there, huh? Johnny shook his head vigorously. "You *crazy?* He's firing at everything in sight . . . Where's Underwood?"

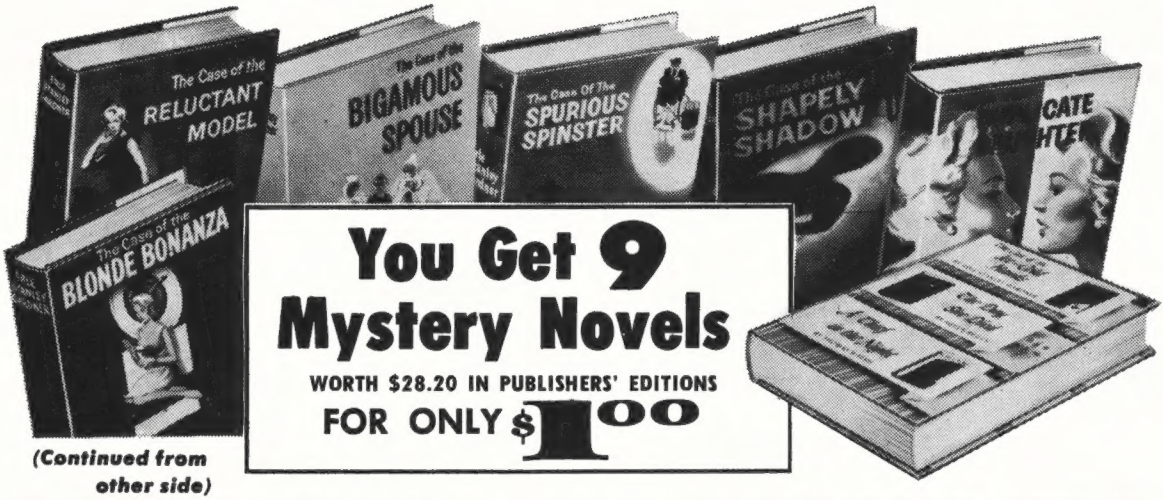
Someone said, "In his room, maybe. He usually sacks out before supper."

Lindoe called, *"Ted . . ."* He went over and opened the door and looked in. "Dark in here . . . Hey—Ted." There was a slight smile on his face. "He *is* sacked out. Rooming with Superman must 've been a strain."

"Maybe," one of the students suggested, "he's dreaming up some of those make-out stories he tells around." There was the sound of another shot. The speaker flinched, licked his lips, smiled faintly. "Boy, what a *lier* that kid, Ted, is . . ."

No one said a word, but as if at a signal, they all turned their heads to the room from which Johnny Lindoe now emerged, and as they looked at his face they understood what was inside.

But as for what was inside Clark, only Clark knew; and perhaps not even he.



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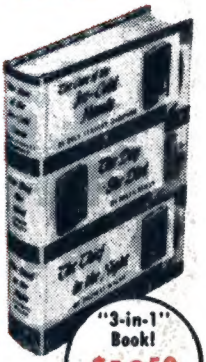

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